

An exploration of how identity capital is constructed in the narrative  
life stories of fathers in areas of disadvantage.

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Research

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## DECLARATION SHEET

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What a journey it has been. I am honoured to have had this experience.

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## Abstract

There is limited research concerning fathers who live in areas of disadvantage and their life experiences. Deficit model thinking and pathologisation of people who live in areas of disadvantage can be found in research and policy, and none more so than for fathers who may not fit desired ideals of fatherhood which are prevalent in society. This study explores how identity capital is constructed in the narrative life stories of three fathers who live in areas of disadvantage in South Wales, UK. In this context, identity capital is defined as the resources that are constructed by relationships with people and society.

The literature focusses on fatherhood and masculinity and how grand narrative views mediate specific generalisations of fatherhood in research and policy. The term *Hegemonic Fatherhood*, is used to stipulate fathering practices that many men may not achieve. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, the thesis enables a focus on fathers' life experiences as a way of highlighting identity capital in their life stories and how this is constructed *Because Of* or *In Spite Of* their relationships with others or the wider social context. A purposeful sample of three fathers from established Dad's groups provided the participants for the study. They were interviewed using Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNiVM), which allows an interview to be directed by the participant without pre-defined topics and themes. Analysis and re-presentation of the narratives highlighted ways in which fathers' identity capital was hindered, including loss of contact with children from first relationships, community violence exposure and female-male intimate partner violence. Fathers were able to construct identity capital resources through the use of *Inverse Protest Masculinity*, a new term which celebrates the ability of fathers in this study to push against the structural forces of society and prejudgements of men living in areas of disadvantage.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explores how identity capital is constructed in the narrative life stories of three fathers who live in areas of disadvantage in South Wales. This study is important on a number of levels. Firstly, it considers a group of men who are fathers and live in an area where there is little research into the experiences of such fathers. It also considers a number of assumptions based on grand narratives about fathers living in such areas that may not be indicative of their personal experiences. Grand narratives (or meta-narratives) refer to the way knowledge and meaning are produced as possible *Truths* within society (see further discourse on *Truth* in Chapter 3). These narratives act as a key to understanding how the world works. It is suggested that society is organised through pre-modern and modern grand narratives that imply a certain truth about the world (Lyotard, 1979). The inquiry is interested in the small stories, the *petits récits* (Lyotard, 1979), home-grown life experience narratives rather than relying on grand narratives that are constructed by considering pre-modern and modern discourses (Stemplewska-Zakowicz, 2000) related to fathers in areas of disadvantage. It is influenced by the philosophical framework of this thesis, namely social constructionism, which adopts as an epistemological position that one way that human beings construct their experiences is through the telling of stories.

### Contributions to knowledge

This thesis considers fathers who live in areas of disadvantage in South Wales where there is very little data connected to fathers in this area that does not see them as deficient in some way or in need of fixing. In light of these issues, I define two new concepts, *Hegemonic Fatherhood* (Chapter 2 and 6) and *Inverse Protest Masculinity* (Chapter 6), both contributing to new thinking around fatherhood. The former highlights the difficulties fathers have to reach an ideal of fatherhood and masculinity. The latter explains the proverbial two fingers that fathers stick up to the grand narratives associated with men who live in areas of disadvantage.

The study also takes the traditional use of the term identity capital and moves the focus from the subjective to the relational, thus also contributing to new ways of thinking (Chapter 2 and 6). Methodologically, it argues for the use of a specific interview method called Biographical Narrative Interview Methods (BNIVM), which is based in a different philosophical framework than its original use in Biographical Narrative Interpretation Method (BNIM) for the use in social constructionist based research (Chapter 3 and 4). The study also considers a detailed methodological process in a narrative inquiry study, which up until now has been difficult to find in literature (Chapter 4). Furthermore, it highlights a clear contribution in the way in which re-presentation of narratives can happen throughout the narrative process and contemplates what this means for researchers (Chapter 6 and 7).

On a personal level, the research was of interest to me because of my work with families in areas of disadvantage and my life experiences of living in areas of disadvantage during the 1980s and 1990s. During this time, there were a number of significant social changes that in I believe led to men and fathers becoming bankrupt in their fatherhood roles and masculine identity. There was a spike in male suicides and drug overdoses in my home towns, whilst community development initiatives and learning seemed to focus on single mothers and children for emotional and social development. A number of my female friends who lived in these areas at the time were able to benefit from types of support not available to men and fathers, and this has enabled many of my female friends to become successful in social advocacy and development roles. I also had minimal contact with fathers apart from an excellent maternal grandfather and uncles; therefore, this study is particularly poignant. My own experiences of fatherhood and fathering based on generally negative experiences. I wanted to understand fatherhood from a different perspective, and look at how fathers do it and do it well and what resources help them along the way.

It is worth considering some of the specific uses of terminology within this study. *Stories* are defined as expressions based on specific themes that are enclosed within narratives (Bruce, *et al.*, 2016). *Narrative* is defined for this study as the wider concept of the spoken and re-presented whole of a story. The term *narrative life stories* is applied in this study to express the type of method used as a way of exploring the experiences of fathers. The term *biographical* is also used interchangeably with *life story/ stories* at times in the study. Whilst

some research would state there is a difference in the terms *biographical* and *life story* (Merrill and West, 2009; Bornat, 2012), this study sees them as interchangeable terms. The terminology offers a way to re-present and refine the ideas of identity (Goodson, 2013) and, therefore, identity capital. Further definitions are useful at this point, including the ideas of father, fatherhood, and fathering. For this study, 'father' can be defined as a male parent who may or may not be directly caring for his own biological, fostered, or adopted child on a day to day basis. They may also be a step-father to children who are not biologically theirs. Fatherhood can be seen as a gendered term to define parental standing and male performance (Scheibling, 2020). It can be associated with concepts such as hegemonic masculinity that give every day meaning to men's lives (Marsiglio and Pleck, 2005). Fatherhood in this study concentrates on the cultural practices that are seen in the United Kingdom and notably South Wales. Note here that Chapter 2 considers fatherhood and uses several studies that are over ten years old. There seems to be a lack of attention in more recent years around the concept of fatherhood in policy and developing concepts. This research addresses the gap. It highlights not only cultural practices of fatherhood in these areas, but considers the changing practices in fatherhood in light of contexts of time, place, and social interactions (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) which have not been considered in research with fathers in this area before this study. Fathering for this study is defined as a verb that denotes producing a child or describing actions around the care of children (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011), be it their own children or the care of others who class them as father, or step-father.

The term *areas of disadvantage* in this study reflects the structural and economic elements of these areas as defined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) (Welsh Government, 2019), rather than an inherent identity associated with the men themselves. *Areas of disadvantage* also reflect areas where there is Flying Start provision, which is /available to all children under four and their families in the highest WIMD areas. This includes parenting support (Welsh Government, 2017a; see also National Assembly for Wales, 2018) from which I was able to get access to my participants who attended Dad's groups.

This thesis follows a traditional structure that reflects the research process as I felt that it was important to keep a structure that was accessible to readers and other researchers and to

allow accessibility to a narrative inquiry study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature that underpins the research, Chapter 3 concentrates on the pilot study, Chapter 4, the methodological journey. Chapter 5 considers the analysis of the narratives and Chapter 6, the discussion related to the findings of the study, and Chapter 7 discusses the conclusions and recommendations. Discussions on structure choice can be found in Chapter 4.

It was decided that the research question: *How is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?* does not require further sub-questions to 'test' hypotheses, as can be seen in other studies. I chose to expand on the research question by embedding a set of Theoretical Questions (TQ) (Wengraf, 2004), which focuses on what the literature tells us we may need to consider to answer the research question (Spikard, 2017) (see Chapter 4). This decision is a matter for the philosophical, epistemological and ontological underpinnings of narrative inquiry, which allows for 'journey' rather than a stopping point of a 'destination' and is considered in depth in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: *The Literature Review* focusses on the underpinning literature that will influence the study. The section commences with a description of the philosophical foundations of the thesis, namely social constructionism and Gergen's (2009) ideas of relational beings. This chapter will consider some ways in which society, media, research and outsiders (not the fathers themselves) will try and create meaning related to the subject of this thesis. It will explain the theoretical framework of the study and consider fathers and fatherhood, concentrating on how men are described in society in ways that may influence the father's identity capital. The literature review also defines identity capital for the purpose of the study and relates it to the idea of the *relational* (Gergen 2009). This then relates to how the use of the term differentiates itself from other forms of capital. The concept of agency is also explored, as it can be argued that how agency is perceived by others affects fatherhood practices and argues for situating agency within the relational rather than held inside of an individual or influenced by external macro constructions of society.

Chapter 3: *The Pilot Study* focusses on the serendipitous change of demographics for the study. This change led to the further conceptual development of identity capital for the research and methodological tensions that meant a total re-think in epistemological understanding. I had initially thought that I would be conducting semi-structured group interviews with female based parenting groups. The research would be based on

participatory methodology and my understanding of identity capital from my postgraduate studies (Pitman, 2014). However, the pilot experience highlighted several difficulties in enacting specific methodologies. The research questions were challenging to operationalise, and identity capital as a concept needed to be reconsidered due to the difficulty in explaining identity capital to participants of the study. The idea was still in its conceptual infancy and did not transfer well to real-life discussions with participants.

Additionally, although using participatory techniques allowed for discussion, this did not give me the depth I needed and left some ethical considerations for this type of research. The pilot study focussed on female participants, because at this point, I had not considered that this study would only focus on fathers. Using fathers for the study was partly a serendipitous opportunity after the pilot had ended. Although the female participants told about themselves and their life stories, my research radar was attuned to picking up words that fitted with traditional identity capital concepts related to cognitive constructs (Côté, 1997; 2002; 2005; 2016, Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Côté and Levine, 2016). This chapter includes a discussion on the change in direction from semi-structured interviewing techniques to narrative inquiry and biographical narrative methods that concentrate on life stories and how these narratives are told (Corbally and O'Neill, 2014) specifically by the participant. As time went on in the research process, I found the methodology I had chosen useful; however, the analysis and interpretation were not. This development can be found in the discussion related to the proceeding chapter.

Chapter 4: *Methodology/ Practices of Inquiry* considers the methodological journey/ practice of inquiry and a number of unexpected challenges that was produced by my decisions and actions. By the time I had chosen and agreed on my interview technique and methodological design, I had serendipitously been given the honour of speaking to fathers who attended Dad's groups about my research. It was a mere stroke of luck that the study then turned on its heel and allowed me to focus on the experiences of men who were fathers in areas of disadvantage. It is worth noting here that this was out of my comfort zone, after spending many years on the other side of the fence, mostly working with women, and on a personal note, being raised primarily by women too. I had little idea of fatherhood or what fathers did in general, and I had to overcome my expectations of what this meant. My journey is interwoven into the fabric of the chapter. The reflexivity process of including my journey

within the methodological process allows for specific research experiences that contribute to this field of knowledge.

The chapter begins with an exploration of some of the ontological concerns of the study itself and the issues of legitimisation, re-presentations, reflexivity, and positionality. The study itself is positioned within a social constructionist paradigm, which means that throughout the process, there is a *carte blanche* criterion for discussions around methodological approach. Legitimisation in the study focusses on the decisions made in terms of research design and decisions made throughout the methodological journey rather than concentrating on predefined ways of gathering the '*Truth*'. Re-presentation is also discussed in this chapter, considering narratives and a discussion around the use of the term fictionalisation in narrative inquiry (Clough, 2002; Trahar, 2018). The diagram within the chapter focusses on the research process and where re-presentation happens. This diagram is constructed and, in itself, is a contribution to knowledge. This is based on the relational space between the narrator, the researcher, others in the story, and the readers themselves. This study uses the term *emboldenment* in a narrative to highlight the way fathers in the study may tell their story to show their own needs and desires that may differ from grand narrative thinking. This chapter also discusses elements of the narrative that are untold, and the awareness that some aspects of a person's life story will be painful and too traumatic to divulge to a researcher. Legitimate research is set out further by considering Richardson's (2000) and Etherington's (2009) ways to legitimise narrative research and contains a checklist for research, which is discussed further in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Chapter 4 itself is 'reflexivity heavy', as is needed, with balance, for this type of research methodology. It is discussed in further depth in this chapter and concentrates on the ethical considerations, thinking narratively according to grand narratives, positionality, emotionality, and 'the space in between' which considers reflexivity and the relational. The research process itself highlights the many twists and turns in the way narrative research can take different paths dependent on these contexts of reflexivity. Reflexivity throughout the research process is highlighted in this chapter as 'Lessons' along the way, which mediate changes of thinking and actions during this stage of the research process. Goodson (2017 p.8) states there is no predefined way of proceeding with interviews, and much of it is 'serendipitous, emergent and even opportunistic.' This was the case in terms of finding myself researching fathers

rather than mothers but also reflected how narrative research throws up several curve balls that could not have been predicted at the start of the research process. This is described throughout this chapter and shows how researchers need to keep on their toes in terms of continually changing environments. Finally, there is a discussion in the chapter around the change from using the full BNIM method, including analysis and the reason for only using the interview method and forms of categorisation called *Lived Life* and *Told Story* for this thesis. I change the focus to interview technique by calling in Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNiVM), although a definite 'steal' in terms of interview method, this is also a contribution to knowledge in so far as it allows its use in relativist and socially constructed inquiry.

Chapter 5: *Tomas, Rob, and Adam: Lived Lives and Told Stories* introduces the reader to the three men who agreed to be part of the study. I would suggest that in reading this analysis/interpretation that you, the reader may find more questions than answers and will at points need to reflect on the impact each story has on your understanding and construction of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. Once again, as is mentioned in Chapter 3, there are visible and honest reflexive accounts of how these stories affected me personally. As Etherington (2009) states, these accounts should affect a reader in such a way as to create emotions, intellectually stimulate and generate new questions. There should be an element of wanting to correct my interpretation, or move you to ask "what if?". These are specifically useful questions in the area of understanding the experiences of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. The three men identified as white, heterosexual males, who live in different areas of disadvantage in South Wales. All men are fathers and carry out their roles in different ways. Their identity capital is constructed through their relationships with people and society around them and there are parts within their individual life stories that highlight some of the ways in which it is constructed and sometimes, how this construction is hindered by the relationships that surround them. Each father is seen as inter-dependent on relationships for their identity capital resources, and each has their story to tell. Although there are interesting avenues in terms of mother and son relationships in the narratives, I felt in each narrative there were stories about how fatherhood itself was shaped by their own father and son experiences. I felt this to be an important contribution to knowledge in this area.



Chapter 6: *Discussion*, is presented in two parts. Part one looks at the research question with regards to how identity capital is constructed in the narrative experiences of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage, and part two discusses the reflections from the methodological journey. Part 1 suggests that fatherhood is a significant positive identity capital resource for all the men in the study. They reflect on their own fathers' relationships with them as children and as they grow up, and generally move away from some of the 'hands-off' approaches to parenting in favour of more present and conscious efforts with their children. Positive relational influences and community settings help fathers construct their identity capital in light of some specific difficulties. However, there is still an element of hegemonic fatherhood, where there is an inability to meet a societal standard of what a father should be, based on grand narratives of providing, presence, and family structure. By re-presenting and analysing the narratives, I constructed a new theoretical term called *Inverse Protest Masculinity*. This is defined as the proverbial middle finger to neoliberal constructs and societal expectations of fathers in areas of disadvantage. This term was constructed to recognise the fathering practices and life experiences of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage and the ways in which identity capital resources are used to ensure they are the best fathers they can be. They do this differently to the grand narrative traditions of fatherhood, and in the backdrop of identity capital resources that support their ability to be the fathers they wish to be.

Part 2 of chapter 6 considers reflections from the methodological journey. This concentrates on using Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNiVM), which is a term that differentiates it from Wengraf (2004) work as BNIM is based in critical realism (Wengraf, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000). The interview technique was first described by Schütze, (1976;1983) and Rosenthal (1998) Although a clear 'take' from other research, it allows a further contribution to knowledge in a way that reflects the ability to use the tools most applicable to create the best outcomes for research and to answer research questions. Consent is also discussed in further depth and highlights the importance of understanding consent and narrative inquiry at the start of the process. This section considers whether narrative inquiry can sometimes slip into psychoanalytical practices by a researcher. Whilst accepting that psychotherapeutic narrative is an approach to narrative research, it differentiates between the actions of the researcher and the actions of a therapist. Agency is

also considered in this section, and the inter-relational aspect is discussed as providing a different way of highlighting the important role of the relational agency in identity capital construction. In concluding, chapter 7 reiterates the contributions to knowledge, considers some of the limitations to the study and sets out suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Narrative inquiry is a postmodern discourse. It dismisses the idea of one great truth, or a truth that needs to be proven by using positivist research methods, and supports an acceptance of 'multiple theoretical standpoints' (Peters, 2001, p. 7). Lyotard, (1979), advocates local and contextual narratives of peoples' experiences (*petits récits*), rather than relying on an objective grand narrative of the problems or issues residing in such localities. To put into context, this literature review explores some of the grand narratives that underpin an observer's knowledge and truths about fathers who live in areas of disadvantage and thus the construction of identity capital for fathers in these circumstances. There are criticisms of Lyotard's (1979) work mainly in the distinction between science and narratives (Grey, 1996; Norla and Irzik, 2003) and whether disregarding grand narratives is itself a grand narrative (Hay, 2002). It can be argued that grand narratives are constructed through pre-modern and modern discourses (Stemplewska-Zakowicz, 2000), but are also encouraged through the rapid growth of technology (Baudrillard, 1981) and messages from social media (Calcutt, 2016). This can influence the way people within society view others has an impact on the grand narratives about fathers in areas of disadvantage. Subsequently this then can influence how fathers and observers would view identity capital. It is also worth noting that researchers learn through the contexts of grand narratives. We learn how to formulate research problems, write conclusions, and structure theses based on grand narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). They play a part in beliefs and values of both researcher and participant, as well as being part of the co-construction of interviews. Grand narratives are not something to ignore in this type of research, as we live in a world that is governed by such narratives. They are part of our identity and identity capital. However, as a researcher concerned with meaning of *petits récits*, it helps to be aware of the impact of such grand narratives on inquiry and prevents filling in the gaps of research with such discourse (Etherington, 2013).

This chapter will consider some of how society, policy, media, research and outsiders (not the fathers themselves) will try to create meaning related to the subject of this thesis. It will explain the theoretical framework of the study and considers fathers and fatherhood, concentrating on how men are described by society in ways that may influence the father's

identity capital. This is explored by considering neoliberalism and its effect on fathers who live in areas of disadvantage, and how this 'sets the scene' so far as how they may be viewed by others. The literature review also defines identity capital for the study and relates it to the idea of the *relational* (Gergen 2009). This then relates to how the use of the term differentiates itself from other forms of capital. The concept of agency is also explored, as to how others perceive agency affects fatherhood, which favours intersubjective understanding and coordinated action, placing all actions within the *relational*.

### A social constructionist approach to narrative inquiry

A research approach, or a paradigm, describes the theoretical framework of the study. They denote epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions. There are some highlighted differences in these terms (Guba, 1990), however for this research, both the term approach and paradigm is used interchangeably (Parsons, 2006 ; Refai, *et al.*, 2015; Warmouth, 2000). At first, I considered a grounded theory approach, due to the acceptance in this project that a person who lives in an area of poverty and disadvantage may have a different view of their reality than, for example, a support agencies' view of their reality (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory in general also fails to recognise the natural prejudice or influence of researcher on data collection (Charmaz, 2003; Hunter, 2010; Hall and Callery, 2001). Although the concept of identity capital is examined, the study is not solely based on an end production of theory. The inter-relational element of data collection, coupled with the grand narrative discourse, qualifies this research to take a social constructionist approach. Described as one of the philosophical influences of narrative inquiry (Etherington, 2013), social constructionism is a theory that promotes knowledge and reality as jointly created by people within society (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). It also encourages the opinions and voices of the participants in the research (Walker, 2015). Social constructionists emphasize how understanding is built from the relationships that surround a person via language and dialogue (Gergen, 2009). This position is unlike positivist research, which implies reality is "out there" in the world, (Burr, 2015), waiting to be discovered (Lincon, *et al.*, 2011), through the use of scientific formulations, or 'data driven rules' (Gergen, 1985, p. 272).

Constructionist and constructivist are terms used for approaches and are sometimes used interchangeably (Praetorius, 2003; Charmaz, 2003; Raskin, 2002). Some suggest amalgamating the terms (Botella, 1995; Burr and Butt, 2000) yet, arguably, there are variances. Constructivism has generally been linked to cognitive psychological approaches (Burr, 2003; Young and Collin, 2004). Gergen (2009), states constructivists view knowledge and reality as assembled by internal schema (Kelly, 1955; Piaget, 1969; Mahoney, 2002; von Glaserfeld, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1991). A social constructionist approach has been chosen as it is less concerned with individuals' internal cognitive processes (Andrews, 2012) and more on the social acquisition of knowledge and to some extent, reality (Young and Collin, 2004). Here, it is argued that knowledge is arranged 'cognitively, and negotiated interpersonally' (Weick, 1979, p. 164) and is constructed by people because they socially relate to others (Gergen, 2009).

Narrative inquiry starts from the epistemological assumption that people will construct meaning from experiences through the telling of stories. In social constructionism, these experiences are not detached and separate from a person as in positivist traditions (Hein, 1991), nor is it completely 'personal, subjective and unique'. Social constructionists see knowledge as a balance, where it is obtained by 'objective means, but is constructed through social discourse' (Rowan, 2010, p. 34). The bedrock of social constructionism rests on how intrapersonal daily dialogue (micro social construction), and influence of a wider social and institutional dialogue (macro social constructionism), in society creates and builds knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. This then relates to a person's identity (Burr, 2003). In terms of the formation of a father's identity, the macro and micro influences on their lives in areas of disadvantage will all have a role to play and are noted in research using ecological models (Katz, *et al.*, 2007). Both micro and macro social constructions are said to influence social conditioning (Fisher, 2009; Morrow, 2007), and it can be argued it is the most powerful and successful society that create the most influence (Danzinger, 1997). Although not a critical theory approach, Foucaultian (Foucault, 1973; 1976; 1979) ideas on power imbalance should be recognised as an influence on such constructions. This is highlighted by the types of grand narratives that are discussed further in this chapter. Agency is also shaped by social

constructions (Burr, 2003; Stanley and Davis, 2011) and is situated within those relationships that surround a father. This study does not specifically focus on which elements of identity, disadvantage, and fathering relate to macro or micro categories as they are difficult to stipulate, (Gergen, 2009). The focus here is on the relational element between the social constructions and fathers in the study. However, the origin and influence of research participants' constructions are said to be profoundly important (Stanley and Davis, 2011) and tie into the focus of the three-dimensional approach to narrative inquiry (see Chapter 4) that extracts meaning from experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

The Realism-Relativism Debate (Cromby and Nightingale, 1999; Edwards, *et al.*, 2003; Parker, 1997) is considered an 'endless game of academic ping-pong' in theory and research (Burkitt, 2003, p. 320). It is important to consider where I pin my peg on the washing line as such, as my philosophical viewpoint on reality will be fundamental to the research process. The debate focuses on whether knowledge and reality are constructed from an outside world that is real and solid (realism), or whether there is no objective reality, or 'truth' (relativism) (LaFrance, 2009) only an internal perception created by individuals (Craib, 1997). Critics state social constructionism is an anti-realist, relativist ontological approach (Walker, 2015), where ontological truth is not as important as epistemology (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Andrews, 2012). Truth differs culturally, and over time (Gergen, 2001). In Gergen's (2009) recent work, *Relational Beings*, there is a suggestion that ontological positions exist in the *relational flow* between people (Shotter, 2012); therefore, there need not be a clash (Hacking, 1999). Social constructionists do not deny the existence of reality but maintain its meaning as being socially constructed through dialogue (Andre, 2000; Cunliffe, 2008), rather than individually constructed. If there was a (washing) line pin a peg on that polarizes the divide amongst relativism and realism, this study would err towards a relativistic standpoint, in line with Gergen's (2014) assumptions. However, as a researcher, I am in no position to judge the reality of others. It could be seen as disrespectful towards the participants of the study if I were to question the reality they describe in their narratives (Trahar, 2009) even though paradoxically, I question the grand narrative assumptions of truth that possibly envelops an objective view of the fathers' identity.

We do not advocate total relativism that treats all narratives as texts of fiction. On the other hand, we do not take narratives at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality. We believe that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these “remembered facts”.

(Lieblich, *et al.*, 1998, p. 8)

It can be understood that the purpose of this research is not to ‘find’ an absolute truth. Narrative inquiry treats stories as knowledge *per se* which constitutes ‘the social reality of the narrator’ (Etherington, 2004:81). Therefore, there can be a dual ontological approach (Harré, 1981), and one can believe that concepts (such as identity, fatherhood, disadvantage, and identity capital) are socially constructed, *and* maintain they correspond with something real in the world to the fathers that tell their stories. This is also reflected in narrative inquiry discourse that can be found in Chapter 3. There have been some criticisms of the view that social constructionism is a relativist standpoint. Hogan’s (2005) argument is that social constructionism has weakened the value placed on researching experiences of people in narratives. Relativist attacks on the ‘self’, or in this study, a person’s identity, means for Hogan that an ‘attack on individual experience is not far behind’ (Hogan, 2005, p. 2). I would argue that this is not the case for research as there are questions related to the self and identity capital, but in this study, the narrative of individual experience is not questioned or attacked.

The term subtle realism derives from the work of Hammersley (1992), Kirk and Miller (1986), and Duncan and Nicol (2004). Researchers who use this approach keep a realist viewpoint, but reject the notion that ‘knowledge must be defined as beliefs whose validity is known with certainty’ (Hammersley, 1992, p.52). Subtle realism allows for the idea of ‘real’ external reality that is known or unknown. However, institutionalised (macro) ideas such as identity, disadvantage and fatherhood are of equal importance to the meanings, ‘values, emotions, [and] beliefs’ of (micro) cultural members’ (Altheide and Johnson, 2011, p. 582). As in social constructionism, equity of voice should be equally respected. There are criticisms of the

approach (Blaikie, 2007; Seale, 1999a; Smith and Heshusius, 1986; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), because it accepts a constructed epistemology while maintaining some form of realism (Maxwell, 2012) however, subtle realism is viewed as an accepted approach in the field of social research (Murphy, et al., 1998; Duncan and Nicol, 2004; Hammersley, 1992). In this study, subtle realism is used because it is impossible for a researcher to comment on what is perceived as real or not for participants.

## Gergen and Relational Beings

Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all, for that is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: In what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say "Now I know how to go on".

(Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 60)

Gergen (2009) considers people as multi-beings, with varying identities that change in accordance to their life experiences and relations with others. Identity is not stagnant, logical or rational. The world is seen as *relational*, meaning 'not within persons but within their relationships' (Gergen, 2009, p.5). He eschews the idea of the *self* as an *inside* and identity as an *outside* construct. This section focusses on these points; however, Gergen's ideas will continually be interwoven with some of the philosophical debates throughout the thesis.

As discussed, identity is viewed as multiple and fluid and is negotiated as part of a socially constructed world in which a person lives. Identity will allow them to be part of, or be different to the society in which they live. The prevailing discourses see the *self* and *identity* as residing in two separate spaces. There is a disagreement that there is an inside *self* and an outside *identity*. The idea of *self* (Gergen, 2009) and *identity* are abandoned as a stable state due to his view that in a world with growing social stimuli, a person has to play out their identity in an ever-increasing and complex field of life experience (Gergen, 1991). The focus should not be on the duality of these states but on the relational elements. For this study, then, self and identity are the same, as they are seen as being defined by the relational. For



example, even thoughts that happen inside our minds are continually related to the relational aspect of being. If I were to think badly of myself because of a particular experience in my past, then this is steadfastly associated with the relational aspects of my life experiences. If I were to feel as if I had no control over certain aspects of my life, it is not a construction of the mind, but a relational experience that has enabled such thought, action or inaction.

There should be a critical reflection on the idea of a psychological *self* that uses vocabulary that identifies the self as an individualized, stand-alone state that resides in the mind (Gergen, 2011). Gergen argues that the categories adopted such as those using models of identity capital (Côté, 1997; 2016, Côté and Levine; 2016) relate to internal mechanisms of *self*. Use of these models, therefore, enables a 'socially binding force' (Gergen, 2011, p. 112) that perpetuates a state of individualised and self-contained *selves* rather than outwardly looking at the relational. These actions relate to a person being viewed as a *bounded being* (Gergen, 2009) in which a person is considered to be standing on their own instead of being connected to the relationships and social constructions that impact on their lives. Gergen's (2009) writing emphasises the latter, that although there is a prevailing discourse in Western psycho-social thought that is concerned with the individualised self, the focus should always be connected to the relational. In all relationships, 'we become somebody' where we play a certain identity. Therefore, we are multi-beings, akin to the definitions of identity related to this study. A person's actions, decisions, and life course are part of relational experiences that happen throughout their lives (Gergen, 2009; 2011). This is particularly interesting when considering the life experiences of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. Identity capital resources are inextricably enmeshed within the relational. We use other's actions as models for our own, and we participate in *co-action*, which means that we interact with scenarios in our own relationships (Gergen, 2009, p.136). These experiences may affect our identity capital in many ways, however, Gergen would postulate that there is no cause and effect (Gergen, 2009). These polarities such as self and identity, or cause and effect, Gergen would state, are irrelevant when considering the relational. Cause and effect are entwined. For this study, it is suggested that they also cannot be pulled apart in analysis of identity capital. A person does not have a separate innate form of agency that impacts on their decision making

because a person's thoughts and actions are a consequence of a number of earlier relationships (Gergen, 2011; 2009).

Critiques of Gergen's work explain that although considering the relational can be highly beneficial for further understanding, there are assumptions within his work that may not make it *relational enough*. Gergen's work explores ongoing relational aspects of co-action and, therefore, co-construction of epistemology and ontological thinking. Silfe and Richardson (2011) provide a number of critiques on the subject of Gergen's (2009) work on relational thinking. They state that this type of co-constructed and absolute freedom to co-construct meaning with others is not possible in day to day living. These meanings about the world and how to live it are always going to be enmeshed in the relationships that surround us. Therefore there is no limitless ability to co-create. There are rules, ways of being, cultural acceptance, and taboos. Relationships can, it seems, help or hinder a sense of agency. Additionally, they believe Gergen neglects other contexts other than the interpersonal. Although the interpersonal in this study would accept the influence of macro constructions in identity capital development, they would argue that the natural world, living in a deeply rooted historical and cultural worlds are also important contexts to consider. Interestingly, by using narrative inquiry for this study, these contexts are involved in the re-presentations of the narratives. Furthermore, although Gergen tries to dispel the ideas around the duality of mind and body by situating his thinking about the relational as 'not in the mind,' Silfe and Richardson (2011) state that Gergen tries to shy away from this dualism in his effort towards the relational. However, they pose it is important to consider both subjective and objective elements of thinking relationally, which includes aspects of context. However, it is worth noting that this context is considered in this thesis as part of narrative inquiry.

## Fathers and fatherhood

Fathers and fatherhood is a particularly stimulating area of study (Doucet, 2007). Fatherhood is seen as a positive developmental milestone for adult men (Palkovitz and Hull, 2018; Palkovitz, 2016) and there has been specific interest in the change of a father's role and how fatherhood should be understood over the past few decades (Dermott, 2008; Hofferth, *et al.*,

2002; Doucet, 2006; Lamb, *et al.*, 1987; Marsiglio, 1993; Gregory and Milner, 2011). From the 1950s onwards, UK society has constructed a male identity through specific social milestones. As family dynamics changed (Townsend, 2002), so did the idea of fatherhood. There was a recognition from this point that the dominant narrative of the family structure consisted of two adults who lived together of differing sexes, with one or more children (adopted or biological), and where adults were having a socially accepted sexual relationship (usually in the form of marriage) (Murdock, 1965). The study of fatherhood only became of academic interest from the 1970s onwards (Dermott, 2008) as an individualised identity. It is difficult to ascertain the actions of fathers prior to 1970 with no research on fatherhood available (Cannito, 2019) other than generalisations of fathers' roles and patterns of involvement with their children (Palkovitz, 2002). The construction of fatherhood from this point related to a 'hands off' approach to child care and development. Fathers were seen as emotionally detached from their children and predominantly constructed as the financial provider (Dermott and Miller, 2015). It can be suggested that feminist discourse around fatherhood (Ruddick, 1983; Oakley, 1974; Dinnerstein, 1977; Chodorow, 1978) provided a lens through which fathers could be seen as something more than just financial providers. The change in traditional family dynamics highlighted the work-family conflicts for men as they tried to maintain the identity of a breadwinner, at the detriment of being involved in the care of their children (Doucet and Lee, 2011; Lamb, 2010; Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, *et al.*, 1987). However, fatherhood became considered through two interconnected actions in research and policy areas: financial contributions (breadwinning) and child involvement (through day to day relationships and care of their children). Fathers being 'good fathers' if they were able to accomplish both (Norman, 2017). Family structures also changed in the past few decades; marriage and indeed partnership as a whole has become optional (Holland, 2017; Lundberg, *et al.*, 2016; Furstenberg, 2019), and cohabitation without marriage has presently increased from 1.3 million in 1996 to 3.3 million in 2017 (Office for National Statistics, 2017a). Same-sex relationships are seen as more acceptable in UK society (The National Centre for Social Research, 2018), and birth rates have also reduced by 3.2% to 657,076 compared to the 2017 birth rate of 679,106 (ONS 2018). It can be argued that there has been a shift of focus from large family units to a more individualised way of life (Côté and Levine, 2016), with a reduction in the social control of elders such as grandparents and parents within the wider family structure (Schwartz and Han, 2014; Furstenberg, 2019). Gender roles also changed

where women not only had more legal rights but became more economically active through employment and able to access a higher level of education (Duflo, 2012). Socially, heterosexual men are also less likely to live with their biological children, and increasingly, living with children of their partners is common (Gregory and Milner, 2011). Parent-child relationships, in many instances, are now more permanent than marriage (Dermott, 2008). There is also an increase in what is known as multi-child bearing or multi-partnered childbearing (Berrington and Stone, 2017; Guzzo, 2014). This is where fathers have children from two or more relationships and where 'time, money and emotion' (Furstenberg, 2019, p. 21) is shared between their children in multiple homes (Thomson, 2014). This can create challenges for fathers to negotiate responsibilities for many groups of children (Petren, 2017; Edin and Nelson, 2013), even if they wish to do so (Berger, Cancian, and Meyer, 2012).

By the early 2000s onwards, involved fathering and fatherhood became the pinnacle of 'good fathering' (Norman, 2017), not just for children, but for fathers' holistic development (Palkovitz, 2002; Dermott and Miller, 2015; Dermott, 2008; Lamb, 2008). Fathers were seen as moving away from being considered breadwinners and gender role models to nurturing hands-on fathers (Lamb, 2008). 'Good fathering' meant wanting to be more connected to their children, seen as wanting to be more involved in their lives and having an active role in fatherhood (Cannito, 2019; Finn and Henwood, 2009; Miller, 2011a). This became known as 'new fatherhood' (Cannito, 2019; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Dermott, 2008). This was reflected in policy where 'new fatherhood' was viewed as supporting the need to actively promote equalities of women in the workforce. Policy focused on 'problem' fathers who were not present in their children's lives, not responsible for their fatherhood duties and uninvolved in the care of their children (Gregory and Milner, 2011). Another term, 'involved fathering' (Palkovitz, 2002), was used where childcare, and active fathering practices were seen as part of political governance to combat the ills of society. In this light, it can be considered that fathering became a moral action that instilled a harmonious society (De Benedictis, 2012). However, for fathers who do not live with their children, 'involved fathering' may not adequately reflect the type of relationships that fathers have with their children. 'Intimate fatherhood' (Dermott, 2008) is a term that relies on a sense of emotional connection with their children (be it biologically or socially). Intimacy here, can relate to the

self, rather than the body (Jamieson, 1998) and therefore counteracts the issue of fathers not being physically present in their children's lives, but still emotionally attached. This can relate to a 'personal and particular' relationship, based on 'closeness, expression of emotions; reciprocity [and a]... one to one relationship' (Bosoni and Mazzucchelli, 2019, p. 3).

With some highlighted issues regarding involved fathering in mind, it is suggested that how a fathers' identity is constructed by policy and society as a whole can affect their experience as a parent within their own communities and wider society (Lutchtmeyer, 2015). Grand narrative definitions of fatherhood, it can be argued, is also linked to masculine identity. The father as a breadwinner or family man, can be seen as shaped on masculine identity based on rigid gender roles, heterosexual relationships, virility and dominance in the home environment (Gregory and Milner, 2011). This is socially constructed to value traits of being the dominant provider, protector and patriarch in which hegemonic masculinity is the default (Åström, 2018). Further writing on hegemonic masculinity can be found in Chapter 6, but hegemonic masculinity can be seen as a set of masculine actions and practices that allow males to be considered the central gendered group. This enactment of masculinity is said to happen in the majority of cultures and societies (Connell, 2005) and emanates attributes such as 'domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness...stoicism and control' (Cheng, 1999, p. 298) in men and leaves a traditional image of a father that is distant towards their children. This may be considered as the most 'honoured way to be a man', even though it is difficult for most men to achieve such status (Cragun and Sumerau, 2017, p. 101). It can be argued that hegemonic masculinities originate in social practices that produce social meanings to what is acceptable in that society and what is not (Messerschmit, 2019). One tension could lie for some men in having a hegemonic masculine identity and being an involved father, who is attentive to their children's' needs, both materially and emotionally and being present in their lives (Kimmel, 2013).

UK society it seems constructs a male identity through social milestones like becoming a father, and over recent decades there has been a significant change in the way fathers and families look and enact with each other. What has been common in fatherhood studies is that the identity of a father is also closely linked with being the financial providers and involved relationships with their children. 'Good fathering' means being connected to their

children and providing for them. This became an element for UK policy and a moral obligation for society to work. The next section focusses on this more deeply, where government policy for families to look after themselves instead of relying on government handout. This highlights the change in political ideology towards neoliberalism and this in itself creates a different grand narrative of and for fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. Not only do fathers have to consider their what masculinity means to them and how they achieve the ideal, but policy itself sees them as now differentiated and individualized in society. This means they have to draw upon their identity capital in a way that had never been considered before. This happened possibly away from the dominant family structure of two adults looking after two children to a place where they may have multiple children in multiple homes. As stated in this section, research in fathers and fatherhood only really started from the 1970's onwards, but it does highlight a considerable shift in the role of the father, of ideals of masculinity and the identity capital needed from the inter-dependent relationships with others and the wider society.

### Neoliberalism and fathers who live in areas of disadvantage

The term neoliberalism is used in this thesis to describe ways of thinking about the role of the state in free markets and the economy; it represents an ideology that requires people in society to be 'responsibilised individuals', who seek minimal support from the state (Brown, 2019, p.29). UK Government, in the late part of the 20th Century, adopted neoliberalism as an ideology that could re-organize society. As such, neoliberalism is an ethos and way of life that permeates all aspects of British society. Here I explain how I conceptualise neoliberalism as an economic ideal and an ideology that has influenced the grand narrative of fathers and fatherhood in areas of disadvantage.

Prior to the Second World War, the world had seen a number of economic crises following stock market crashes associated with the Great Depression of 1929 that affected the world's economies (see Galbraith, 2009 [1954]). This was attributed to a laissez-faire ("let it be") liberalist way of managing the economy, where governments would have little regulation, planning or active part to play in the role of how markets are run. After World War Two, the UK government at the time took up John Maynard Keynes' (1936) economic ideas. Keynesian

economics proposed that governments should be part of the economic markets, thus free markets could automatically provide full employment. Keynes at the time could be regarded as the poster boy for economic revival and prosperity in the UK and a way of ensuring there would never be another global market downturn (Metcalf, 2017). This, as well as Beveridge's (1942) ideas which included a welfare state allowed for a welfare safety net for when times were hard, became the new way of structuring society. Mitigating inequality caused by market downturns and supporting the welfare state it seems, would ensure that the UK would not suffer another major depression. However, Keynes' ideas rested on full employment, and in the idea that supply of goods created demand thus government spending on factories and infrastructure would automatically create jobs and increase demand and spending. By the latter years of the 1970's Keynesian ideas were going out of fashion as stagflation, global oil prices, and high unemployment led to recessions around the world (Macallister, 2011). During the time of Keynes' primary success in 1936, Friedrich Hayek was recruited to the London School of Economics, possibly to dim the raising star of Keynes (Metcalf, 2017). His ideas proved unfruitful during the Keynesian economic upsurge, and it would take until the late 1970s for Hayek's ideas became popular. Hayek's work not only encompassed economic reform but was a total world view; born out of his fear of the collectivism that spurred Nazism and totalitarianism, which he personally witnessed in Vienna (Hayek, 1945; 2010 [1949]). He believed in a free market away from state control, and although socialist thinking in general was not evil or selfish, any form of collectivism, he believed, should be attacked as it can lead to disaster (Hayek, 2010 [1949]; Williams, 2005). This train of thought became what was described as *neoliberalism*; a term used in 1938 by scholars who formed the Mont Perelin Society where Hayek and Milton Friedman (1957) were members. The group felt the expansion of the government (especially in state welfare), trade unions, and the threat of inflation was exceptionally dangerous to a civilized society (Mont Perelin Society, 2019). Individualism was a better solution. People should, he states, be free to develop their own individual gifts, to act independently, away from the state. Dependence on the state, he believed is 'a form of slavery and where the main source of employment is the state 'opposition means death by slow starvation' (Hayek, 1945, p.43). Neoliberalism, unlike laissez-faire liberalism, believed the state had to be part of the organisation of a market economy and free markets must be won politically (Metcalf, 2017). Both Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister in the UK from 1975- 1999 and Ronald Regan, the

President of the USA from 1921 – 1989, were fans of Hayek’s work (Montague, 2018). Thatcher came into power during a world recession in the 1970’s which included the UK’s own issues - the ‘Winter of Discontent’ (1977 – 1978), where there was a high unionised workforce and a number of high profile strikes due to ongoing wage and reduced wage constraints (López, 2017). Thatcher, it can be argued, quickly took up the ideology of neoliberalism and went about changing the landscape of society as we know it today by considering people as individuals capable of forging their own path in life. It was felt that state owned parts of society and social group organisation only prevented a new way of thinking about wealth, economics and social order. During her terms in office, bank regulation was dismantled, equality scorned, trickle-down economics celebrated, and a blind eye was given to tax evasion by wealthy businesses (Jaques, 2016). Competition was also (and still is) key for market success. The privatization of social security, prisons, health, roads, higher education, knowledge, utilities and travel was seen as part of entrepreneurialism, a concept in neoliberalism that was celebrated and encouraged.

‘Responsibilising’ individuals rather than allowing them to rely on state intervention was also a main driver at this time (Brown, 2019 p.12). It could be argued that ideologies of each UK government since Thatcher’s government has relied on a sliding scale of the belief that people’s own responsibility to themselves is paramount. It could be suggested that each prospective government since Thatcher, took on board neoliberal ideologies that affect the way they work in the economic market, and sets out how society is organised and supported by the state. On the one side of the scale, there are conservative reactionary neoliberals (such as Thatcher), who believe the minimal state support should be given to individuals in society and on the other, more progressive neoliberals who dabble in social policies which support and believe in equality (such as the Blair and Obama governments) (Klein, 2019). The Blair Labour government of the late 1990s and early 2000s promoted the idea of a neoliberal society where all could be seen as ‘middle class’ (Prescott, 1999) just through aspiration alone. The welfare state was now going to be “active not passive, genuinely providing people with a hand up not a hand out” (Blair, 1999), and class structures that were relied on to identify different social classes prior to the mid-1990s were quashed (see Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), 1980; Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 1963). The word *class*



was replaced by *socioeconomic status* in policy, and in doing so, it can be argued, eliminated the idea of a working-class society (Manstead, 2018), and placed the emphasis on ownership of *status* on an individual. However, it can be argued, that not all people could be fit into this category just by the elimination of a title. Those who could not fit into the category of working, tax-paying and property-owning people were now without identification. In the media, the right-wing press suggested that respectable working class people had almost 'died out' and left people who lived in 'self-inflicted squalor' (Heffer, 2007, *online*). It could be argued that the people (see fathers) who relied on the trickle-down economics were now enemies of the state. They were seen as people who lacked motivation and maintained low levels of education within their communities. These people were defined as the *underclass* (Heffer, 2007; Jones, 2016) and society moved away from the notion that poor (working-class people) could be respectable and decent (Lawler, 2005).

It seems there is a high moral tone in neoliberalism which needs society to be structured in a certain way to ensure success of this ideology and this affects fathers and families. Hayek (1945) believed that traditional (Christian) morality places affairs of the family and society directly with individuals, not with the state. From the 1990's onwards, there had been a social and political expectation for fathers to be economically, emotionally responsible and active in their children's lives (Cannito, 2019). Nonetheless, in society, fathering constructions may not have accommodated such political need. Around this time, the grand narrative discourses of *the underclass* could be seen as related not to the degree of poverty but its *type* (Murray, 1994) (emphasis added), and that there was blame on fathers themselves for such social discourse (Murray, 1996). It suggests some cause of being part of the underclass relates to mothers who choose to have 'illegitimate' children and fathers who are absent from their responsibilities as a parent. Slipman offers a critique of Murray's radical solutions:

...if men cannot meet that dependence through work there is no point in doing this apart from trying to make the working class behave more like the middle class, to curb the power of uppity women, and to stop the lower orders from breeding excessively. Eugenists have been trying to do that from time immemorial. (Slipman, 1996 p.166)

Contributing around this time to the debate, Field, (1996) and Jenks (Jenks, 1990) related underclass to both structural issues and agentic means. The underclass relates to the exclusion of the poorest people within society, which prevents them from actively becoming citizens. Gans (2006) and Waquant (2008), for example uses the term to denote being behaviourally and culturally deviant, and 'just non-middle-class ways' (Gans, 1996, p. 142). This related to income and life experiences. Jenks would concentrate on the inability to gain long-term employment and 'deviant behavioural norms' (Jenks, 1990) and highlights how political policy relies on seeing people (fathers) as individualized objects, standing away from the collective. It can be argued that these constructions and ideas related to fathers who may live in areas of disadvantage created a stereotype that permeated not only politics and policy (Jones, 2016), but media and society. Television comedy programs such as Shameless (Channel 4, 2004-2013) and High Hopes (BBC Wales , 2002-2008) showed families from areas of disadvantage and feckless, dysfunctional and workless. 'Chav' was one term that permeated UK society that identified a population of people who lived in such areas (Jones, 2016). It could be argued that the term 'chav' plays the same role as calling people 'white trash' (O'Neil, 2019), a way of subjugating white people who live in areas of disadvantage as people who are beneath others, and who are morally bankrupt. The narrative at the time highlighted that 'broken societies' came from 'broken families' where fathers were absent or living apart from the family unit (Lister and Bennet, 2010). On a personal note, I remember being a single parent mid-2000s, claiming Child Tax Credit benefits and how a Labour policy required both parents to be named on a birth certificate for me to have the full amount of entitlement to this benefit. The name of my child's father needed to be given, so the Government could find them and ask for child maintenance to subsidise my Tax Credit benefits (see Barnes, 2018). The only get out clause for not telling them the father's name was if you did not know the name of the father or that the child was a product of rape (Woodward, 2006). Two extremely moralistic reasons for a state to decide to help a parent and child. I remember that had I not told them the name of my son's father, I would be docked £20 out of my weekly benefits. This amounted to about a quarter of the money I had to live on at the time (other forms of government policy that cross moral and ethical lines, it can be argued, include recent legislation to limit benefit support to two children per family claim (UK Government, 2017). These moral and ethical lines were drawn and responsibility for affairs of the family and society was directly attributed to individuals rather than the

state, and those parents who deviate from the state held norms such as not being in a relationship with the birth parent, would not be included in state help. This resonates with neoliberal ideology. This it could be argued, is a negative response from those who impose the label of underclass from outside the communities they view (Waquant, 2008), and mainly from a middle-class and white vantage point. Parents in general, and especially in areas of disadvantage, were also considered to blame for society's ills due to their poor parenting skills (De Benedictis, 2012; Bramley, 2016), where they made 'wrong' choices (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008), which needed support and correction. Even worse than single parent mothers were fathers who were not seen as involved or present in the lives of their children and as described above were considered the 'most destructive factor in modern society' (Pollard, 2011, online). This highlights deficit model thinking around fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. The deficit model or approach relies on norms and values within society being created from white middle-class experiences, values and neoliberal attitudes of 'responsibilisation' against which every other culture, value, and experiences are considered (Terrile, 2019; Matos, 2015). The deficit model contributes to the stigmatization of populations, and it can be argued, fails to consider social and environmental influences that have a significant impact on an individual and focusses on the negative aspects of human experience (Anglin and Polanco-Roman, 2017). The deficit model approach has been studied in areas of disability (D'Amato, *et al.*, 2005; Oliver, 2013; Inkle, 2019), education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Qualifications and Education Authority, 1998; Dudley-Marling, 2015; Smit, 2012; Weiner, 2006); health (McGrath *et al.*, 2020) and criminal justice (Feilzer, 2015). Additionally, although not identified as deficit model ideas, this can also be reflected in media and race studies (Hall, 1997a; Hall, 1996a).

Fathers living in areas of disadvantage I argue, have been discussed through the deficit model approach and this undermines their fathering practices. Just living in an area of disadvantage, it seems, allows for pathologisation where fathers themselves were blamed for their own poverty and disadvantage. As Crane and Heaton (2008 p.ix) state, 'behaviours and values of the poor... play a role in persistent poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty', and fathers themselves were blamed for specific 'discourses of familial disorder and dysfunction, (and) dangerous masculinities' that create a 'moral decay' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 424). UK policy during the 2010s onwards veered towards family policy and

early intervention to prevent such 'decay' as key priorities (Cullen, 2011). Through this kind of neoliberal rhetoric (De Benedictis, 2012), fathers in areas of disadvantage became a key resource for policy, as they were seen as part of the problem within a society (Gregory and Milner, 2011). Fathers' involvement with their children was seen as being imperative in the 'cure' of a number of social problems such as antisocial behaviour (Cameron, 2011), child poverty (O'Neill, 2002), and the perceived over-reliance of single mothers on the state system (House of Commons Hansard, 1997). 'New fatherhood' (Dermott, 2008) was seen as an acceptable norm and 'good' fathers (Norman, 2017), were present rather than absent, and involved in the care and financial support of their children. However, very little was written about fatherhood and what it looked like for fathers in areas of disadvantage. Very little was known about the types of issues that helped and hindered their ability to be the fathers they wished to be.

I argue in this section that the way society views fathers who live in areas of disadvantage is closely linked to neoliberalism that became part of UK society around the same time as academics started to study fatherhood as a subject. Neoliberalism, from its conception, through various government interpretations and sliding scales of state help, to the way society and government view people as individuals who should be responsible for themselves with little help from the state, has played a part in how fathers are seen and supported to be the fathers they wish to be. Political choices such as neoliberalism will affect the people (fathers), who depend on the state to make their lives better. Fathers in areas of disadvantage who are not as involved as they wish to be and who cannot provide for their children appear to be, in my opinion, 'fair game' in policy as one of the main reasons for societal ills and are commonly talked about using deficit model words and policy actions. Chapter 5 discusses some of the ways in which society changed during the fathers' life stories, and each I argue, is underpinned by a social re-organisation of neoliberalism. In a world that honours competition, aspirations, entrepreneurialism and individualized responsibility, it can be difficult for people who wish to be part of something bigger and fatherhood requires a social connection and a relationship with others to be a father. It is important to consider how neoliberalism may play a part in the life stories of Tomas, Rob and

Adam, and to consider signs of how this worldview would underpin some of their own life stories and their relationship to others and the world around them.

### Parenting classes and Dad's groups

This section considers the type of parenting support that was available for fathers who lives in areas of disadvantage, concentrating on father's groups as ways in which fathers could get together and talk about parenting on a weekly basis and how this could be perceived as projecting middle class values on another part of society. However, my own experience of these groups as a facilitator and researcher has made me understand how important these groups were to fathers in these areas. Sadly, there have been a number of cut backs in recent years which has shortened the time allowed in some groups (6 weeks rather than years) and I feel this is disappointing, as they have helped many fathers I knew.

In general, parenting classes, alluding to both Dad's, Mum's and mixed groups in areas of disadvantage, were part of policy for both Labour and Conservative governments, arguably as a form of educating parents to be better at their job of parenting. From the mid-2010s, parenting became part of the provision offered in Sure Start/ Flying Start areas, which were deemed as the areas of most disadvantage. There has been a number of studies during this time that linked poverty to difficulties in parenting (Smith and Middleton, 2007; Hooper, *et al.*, 2007; Russell, *et al.*, 2008). Although parenting support could be classed as a positive support system for any parent, there seemed to be a 'tacit moral judgement' around the type of support offered (Gilles, 2005, p. 70). Parenting support could be viewed as a 'euphemism' for professionals to be involved in how parents should behave (van der Wolf, 2013, p. 27). Parenting was part of a larger agenda which linked it to social mobility and inclusion (De Benedictis, 2012). If only parents could parent 'right,' then they would raise children who were not in poverty. However, as discussed, as was the political ideology, parents in areas of disadvantage were seen as needing 'support' to become 'empowered' (Gilles, 2005) and to aspire to middle-class values (Hey and Bradford, 2006). In recent times, the Conservative government has also pushed the idea that poor parenting is part of the scourge of modern society that keeps whole swathes of communities in disadvantage (Bramley, 2016). As discussed previously, this may rely on deficit model thinking of parents and fathers in areas of

disadvantage, which can be defined as not being engaged in their children's educational learning or engaged in the 'right' ways of parenting and is synonymous with low socioeconomic status (Gilles, 2005). A 'poor parent' has a double and entangled meaning, seeing parents who live in areas of disadvantage as those who do not parent well, as well as being economically worse off than the rest of society (Goodall, 2019). These parents are seen as in a cycle of deprivation (Gilles, 2005; Welshman, 2006) in which every generation stays within the boundaries of disadvantage. Granted, fathers who live in areas of disadvantage are not a homogenous group, but it would be unfair to suggest that they are not 'good' parents even if they did continue to live in poverty. In fact, the culture of poverty, such as the cycle of disadvantage, has been lambasted as a myth (Gorski, 2008). It can be argued that the ideology of 'new fatherhood' combined with the interest in parenting support could be seen as an attempt to instill middle-class values on working-class or disadvantaged areas (Gewirtz, 2001; Cullen, *et al.*, 2013). The idea that fathers in these areas are not involved, attentive and caring has coloured the view of such fathers. 'Poor parents' has a double meaning that cannot easily be pulled apart. If you are poor, then you are a poor parent in both actions and resources (Goodall, 2019).

It is also difficult to find evidence of the role related to 'new fatherhood' and fathers who live in areas of disadvantage because there is little evidence of understanding how fathers 'father' in such areas. The only evidence of working with fathers relates to work-related outcomes (see Rob's narrative in Chapter 5) and the small minority of fathers who are deemed at risk of child safeguarding concerns (van der Wolf, 2013). These evaluations concentrate on outcomes related to child and behaviour management (McCracken and Deave, 2012) rather than the holistic view of fatherhood in terms of intimacy or relationships. It is also problematic to extrapolate data to see the effects of support services with fathers, as the research suggests that evaluated parenting interventions fail to disaggregate in relation to gender (McAllister and Burgess, 2012). Therefore, it is difficult to find research on fathers and their interactions with services such as Dad's groups. For example, in the recent Welsh Government evaluation of Flying Start parenting, out of 72 families, 63 mothers and two fathers participated on their own. It is unclear if the other families included males. Of

this total, only a third took up the parenting support entitlement and it is unclear if there were fathers in this total (Thomas, *et al.*, 2018).

For parenting classes and Dad's groups, the focus in many areas is on a set of activities that look at how parents increase their childrearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills, and social support) and competencies (Daly, *et al.*, 2015). As Goodall (2019) suggests, this reads more like a job description than a coming together to discuss relationships and answers to problems. Additionally, in Wales, Dad's groups have started to become more streamlined in line with funding cuts in early prevention and intervention services related to reduced funding in local government due to austerity measures (National Children's Bureau, 2015 ). Whereas some men were able to come to Dad's groups for some time and were able to grow a number of relationships and a safe space, now there is a focus on six-week programs which follow strict content without being able to change the program to meet the needs of the fathers. In some areas of Wales, there has also been a cultural shift from working with fathers separately, to working with couples (Tavistock, 2019) even though some men (and women) parent alone and may be in need of more company.

It is interesting that literature points to some of the reasons for establishing Dad's group may have been to encourage middle class parenting standards, and also created to focus on economic output such as getting fathers closer to the job market. However, organising and setting up Dad's groups can have positive outputs including being a safe space for fathers and to build relationships with others. These areas however are not discussed in research in depth and it can be argued as only focusing on childrearing resources (again, arguably, a deficit model of thinking). The future of Dad's groups is quite uncertain in changing times and more research on the relational aspect of groups would be useful for policy and research.

### 'Hegemonic Fatherhood'

*Hegemonic fatherhood* is a term created for this study to stipulate the ideal of fatherhood practices that many men may not achieve. The term is constructed to take into account the deficit model thinking of men in these areas of disadvantage, the neoliberal ideals of

fatherhood, namely presence, attention and financial contribution, and the complexity of fathering practices. This was part of being a responsible individual in society (Brown, 2019). Hegemonic fatherhood can be used as a way of describing the way fathers live in the knowledge of grand narrative ideals and are aware of their inability to meet those ideals. For hegemonic fatherhood to be actualised, fathers themselves would need an inordinate amount of identity capital resource in relation to their ability to connect and have supportive relationships with those closest to them, including their own children, and within the wider society. They would also need to fit into the way society views the role of fathers, creates policies around family life, and fit into its social norms (Sen, 1992; Norman, 2017). With this in mind, it could be suggested that the grand narrative for fathers living in areas of disadvantage, the idea of 'new fatherhood' combined with societal and political view on them as fathers may be a difficult impasse. Although 'new fatherhood' is a political, practice and linguistic shift (Dermott and Miller, 2015), it can be argued that it is difficult to conceptualize what was 'new' about it and how far the ideology of 'new fatherhood' has come (Dermott, 2008; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Magaraggia, 2012). Without specific research and information on fatherhood within areas of disadvantage, it is also difficult to know how fathers experience fatherhood in these areas at all. Their practices are practically invisible to researchers, and therefore for a number of years, fatherhood from the experiences of men in areas of disadvantage has passed without comment. Additionally, recent theoretical shifts in gender studies research consider issues of 'caring masculinities'; men who find identity in caring for others, be it in a workplace, elderly care or parenting in light of the inability for many men to achieve hegemonic masculinity (Hanlon, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Hrženjak *and* Scambor, 2019; Scambor, *et al.*, 2014). Caring masculinities incorporates values of care into masculine identities. These values include interdependence, support, empathy, attention, and co-responsibility (Elliott, 2016). These actions can provide positive self-affirming feelings for men (Hanlon, 2012). Caring masculinities is seen as a way for men to have a role within society when they are not able to achieve other more traditionally masculine roles (Scambor, *et al.*, 2014). Traditional masculine roles include men having a 'protection pass' in society for protecting the state, women, and children whilst also having a 'production pass' for breadwinning in life, which has traditionally allowed for a societal dominance of masculine identities (Tronto, 2013, p. 72). This dominance has often led to a



narrative where men are often, and perhaps wrongly portrayed as ‘care-free and care-less’ (Hanlon, 2012, p. 24).

It can be argued that caring masculinities do provide rejection of the domination of hegemonic masculinity, which aids positive experiences for men and for society as a whole (Elliott, 2016). However, this can prove difficult for some men including men in areas of disadvantage where men are reported as feeling disheartened and disappointed with the lack of employment opportunities (see Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne, 2016; Walker and Roberts, 2018). They may also find it difficult to take on care roles including parenting that is more historically defined by women (Hrženjak and Scambor, 2019). However, it may be argued that caring masculinities require a great deal of relational and societal support and resource. Caring masculinities also require an element of power and agency if considering it as some form of rejection of dominant hegemonic masculine identities (Elliott, 2016). Consideration needs to be given to men who have difficulty accessing resources of relational support, emotional connection and equality in the responsibility of care for their children. It is possible that in some circumstances fathers are not protectors or providers in the ways that are described in hegemonic masculinity, despite wanting to be. They would also find it difficult to attain the ability to be the fathers they wish to be because of societal and relational experiences. As discussed in the next subsection, this relates to the relational resources needed to construct identity capital.

Therefore, instead of concentrating on caring masculinities as a theoretical label for the masculine identities of the fathers in this study, I define the term *hegemonic fatherhood* to stipulate the ideal of fatherhood practices that many men may not achieve. In relation to caring masculinities, this term provides a platform to view men’s experiences who may not have the resources to reject dominant masculinities and therefore would not be able to attain the power that is required for hegemonic fatherhood. Borrowing from Cragun and Sumerau (2017, p. 101), hegemonic fatherhood relies on the social constructions of what is seen as the most ‘honoured way to be a father’. By considering the historical and theoretical arguments in this section, hegemonic fatherhood would, therefore, rely on the neoliberal ideals of being responsible towards their offspring. Being a provider and breadwinner form masculine identities but it would also require close, expressive, one to one relationship with

their children and have the ability to reject hegemonic masculinities and dominance for that of caring masculinities. Hegemonic fatherhood would rely on a dominant position in relation to other fathers who may not be able to achieve such goals. Hegemonic fatherhood would need to rely on coordinated action or a co-action (Gergen, 2015) with others or the world around them. These relational resources would be paramount to its actualization. Unlike hegemonic masculinity, where there is a societal structure that legitimizes a man's dominance over others in society, hegemonic fatherhood would only be actualised under the above circumstances. Hegemonic fatherhood and arguably caring masculinities rely on relationships and interdependence within micro and macro level social constructions.

### Identity Capital: A new focus on fatherhood in areas of disadvantage

This study defines identity capital in a unique way that contributes to identity capital research. This definition can be used as a means of considering the resources already established in fathers' life experiences that allow them to be the fathers they wish to be. This agency is seen as relational and happens *because of* and *in spite of* the relationships that are part of the fathers' life stories. This means identity capital is re-defined from a cognitive 'in the head' construct, and lifts it outside, into the middle of the relational elements of social life (Gergen, 2009). It also places emphasis on the relational rather than the individual, and for this study is constructed by considering the fathers narrative life stories and experiences. Identity capital resources are also related to the way fathers navigate their life story *because of* and *in spite of* these relationships. As the discourses of the 'underclass' relate to blame and agency of fathers, the chapter ends by considering agency as relational rather than situated within a person or part of the structure of society.

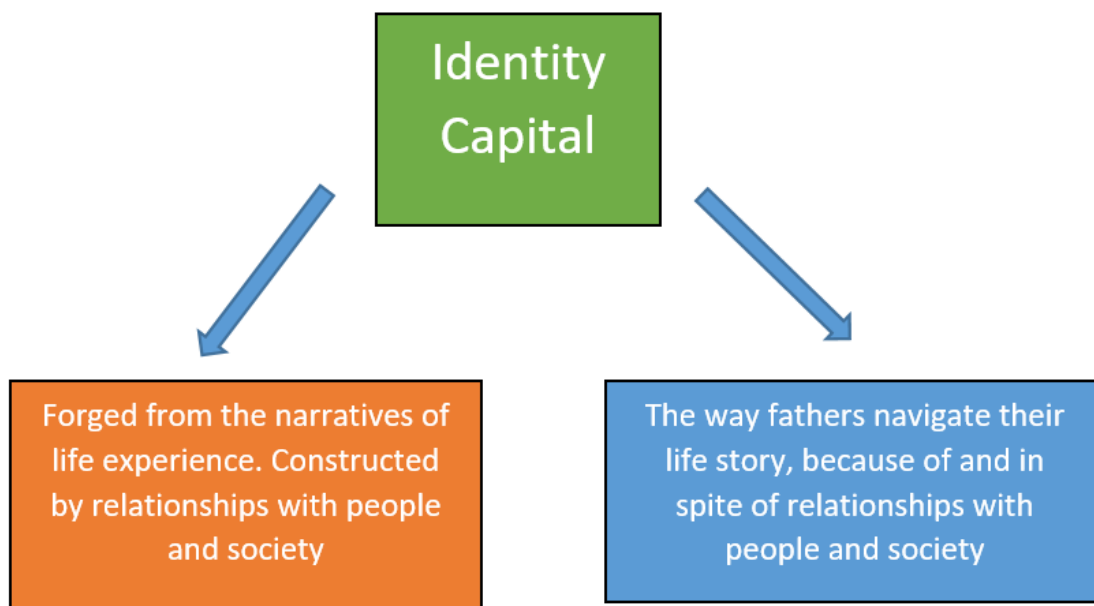


Figure 1: Revised general definition of identity capital for this study

Defining the term identity can be unclear, complicated, and at times, vague (Bosma, 1995; Fearon, 1999). Its definition is usually dependent on perspective and the specialism of inquirers (Grotevant, 1998). In this study, identity is forged from the narrative life stories of fathers' life experiences (McAdams, 1988). Experiences are *constructed from and within* the relationships with people and society as a whole. Identity is viewed as socially constructed and multiple, meaning there is no 'integral, unified identity' (Hall, 1996, p. 1), which is constant (Lyotard, 1984). Rather, it is dynamic, unstable, and disjointed and is always being negotiated by social potentials and limitations (Sears, 2011). Therefore, for this study, a father's identity is constructed through these relationships, whether they are seen by the individual as helpful, or a hindrance.

*Capital* is related to the resources constructed by such relationships. These are situated in the social interactions of people closest to the fathers in the study (Ho and Bauder, 2012) and the macro-level constructions that impact on their lives (Burr, 2015). Capital, can be described as resources a person needs to fulfill their role in society (Lewin, 2005). There are various forms of capital that are present in literature which are 'sources of profit, advantage

and power, as well as net assets and resources' (Côté, 2005, p. 225), that are needed for social, political, economic or personal gain (Nahapiet, 2011). It may denote the greater purpose for the countries' economic gain (circulating capital) (Smith, 1776/1904); physical or financial capital (Becker, 1994; Johnson, 1960; Schultz, 1961), or to help them ascend the ladder of social class, such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Sullivan, 2002). Nahapiet, (2011) explains that many of the so-called 'hybrid' forms of capital (other than those which relate to human capital) fall short of the economic definition, and there is the suggestion that they should be abandoned all-together (Baron and Hannan, 1994; Sollow, 2000). For this study, capital related to the economic growth of a country is abandoned for more specific interest in resources constructed by people and society with the intention of fathers to be the people they want to be.

Identity capital can be seen as part of the symbiotic relationship between human capital and social capital (Schuller and Watson, 2009; Côté and Levine, 2002; 2016; Côté, 1997; 2016). Both human and social capital is used in policy and research as descriptions of resources needed within a society to enable personal and social gain. Although all forms of capital can have a symbiotic relationship, I believe there have been specific problems in focussing on actions related to human and social capital without considering identity capital. These are explained in the further sections in more detail. I first encountered the word identity capital in my postgraduate studies (Pitman, 2014). I used the term in my work to describe the self-esteem and confidence needed for a parent to succeed in adult education. This was complimentary to the way Schuller and Watson (2009) and Nordic Network for Adult Learning (2007) describe identity capital as a way to maintain self-esteem and a sense of meaning as one of the purposes of life-long learning. Identity capital was described as a resource that:

...deepen[s] their self-knowledge and reinforce self-image as this is the basis for effective competence development in other fields.

(Schuller and Watson, 2009, p. 16).

It is seen as an investment in the *self* and worked symbiotically alongside both human capital, which was seeing learning as a resource for the economy, and social capital, which was learning as a resource for society (van der Veen, 2012). Identity capital has also been described as the sense of 'personal worth and belonging' a person achieves through the act of learning (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), 2011, p. 10). This was an interest of mine, as I had been a parenting worker, and being part of parenting groups is one of the ways in which fathers in areas of disadvantage could gain confidence and self-esteem. I then encountered the work of James Côté. His research primarily considers adolescents and the transition to adulthood by targeting the resources needed to 'negotiate life passages in increasingly individualistic, complex world' (Côté 1996, p.435). He defined identity capital as a 'set of psychosocial skills' (Côté and Levine, 2002, p. 157) or 'a set of strengths' (Côté and Levine, 2002, p. 164) that help a person navigate a world which is precarious and difficult. Côté's descriptions of identity capital are underpinned by the Erikson/Marcian tradition (Erikson, 1959; Marcia, 2002), which considers identity formation through life stages. The view is that people find it difficult to gain the resources needed to succeed, to 'fit in' in communities, society, and workplaces, and the term is used as a more generic way of grouping together with other forms of capitals as a set of resources available to people to navigate social situations (Yu and To, 2019). Côté' describes these forms of resources as functional capital that derive from ego strengths (Erikson, 1968 Côté and Levine, 1987; 2015) or, *agency* (Côté, 2016). These are viewed as *internal constructions* that help a person manage themselves in certain contexts. Côté *et al.*'s research on identity capital uses such terms and relates to psychosocial research on identity. These include descriptors and measurements of true/false statements that focus on the 'inner' subjective identity (such as agency) (Kircher and Leube, 2003; Haggard and Tsakiris, 2009), self-concept, self-esteem (Baumeister, 1999) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; 1997; Decks, 1999) (Côté, 1997; 2002; 2005; Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Côté and Levine, 2016).

Up to this point of research, identity capital has focussed on issues of the *self*. This was one challenging issue that has been overcome through the period of study. For example, the use of scales related to identity capital that of using the psychosocial language of the 'self' which focusses on 'inner' psychosocial constructs is used to capture scores related to how much identity capital a person has acquired (Côté, 2016)(see Appendix 1). This was also evident in

my work in this pilot study (see Chapter 3), where the coding related to the themes of psychosocial research, such as confidence or self-esteem, hindered the interviews themselves. Although Côté recognises that a person's identity develops in relation to social resources such as family, friends and macro-social constructions, his work positions identity capital inside of a person, treating it as cognitively held categories, which are 'switched on' during social interactions (Korobov, 2015, p. 211). For Côté, the idea that any resource attributed to the relational elements of life (Gergen, 2009) is a taken for granted assumption, however highlighting the relational may prove to be illuminating for understanding identity capital in this context (Côté, 2018). Although it may be a given for social psychologists, I argue that it is sometimes forgotten as an important issue. The practice of isolating other considerations and focusing on inner constructions can be common in working with people who live in areas of disadvantage. For example, my experience of hands-on work with parents, using scales to map any type of personal change can be challenging. It is common that fathers groups will use outcome measurements similar to descriptors set out in Côté's work that used to show pre-and-post intervention changes (Appendix 2). As well as measuring parenting changes, they also relate to scale type choices for self-concept or self-esteem (see Rosenberg, 1965, Janis and Field, 1959; Coopersmith's self-esteem inventory, 1969; and Fitts, 1964), and self-efficacy scales (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). These focus on closed-ended rating scales (Leary and Tangey, 2012) which pre-define the items to measure, and may not be particularly important for the participant. It is also stated that low scoring on such scales may relate to cultural issues (Beane and Lipka, 1986), such as the perception of the questions asked and language used. In my own experience of working with parents and such scales, it is common that parents would score related to 'how they felt on that day', rather than a reflective consideration of a whole journey (Pitman, 2014). It can be argued that these scales are a snapshot of a situation without considering the context. Unless there are specific discussions and understanding around why a person may feel a certain way, then it can be argued that they serve no meaning to the task of supporting families. The only purpose is to evaluate 'interventions' on a group of people by professional workers.

Identity capital, as a concept, has featured infrequently in adult research and literature. Apart from Schuller and Watson's (2009) use, Ho and Bauder, (2012) refer to it as the interpersonal

skills needed in a multicultural workplace; and Matthys (2010; 2013), highlights the autonoimical qualities of academics who have succeeded despite coming from areas of disadvantage and poverty. Ho and Bauder, (2012) state that in adulthood, identity capital can be used in social interactions, allowing for a person to draw on their previous and present social understandings of the world and allow them to use their resources to navigate new social environments (Ludvig, 2006; Côté, 2007). Identity capital research that focusses on adults seems to once again point toward the ability to work and succeed in the workplace whilst navigating structural barriers such as poverty, culture, and social interaction. There is a question as to why there is a focus on employment rather than a consideration of other areas of life in which identity capital is also important, for example, fatherhood and relationships? Additionally, academic research into resources needed for fathering can be seen as categorised in a reductionist way. For example, Palkovitz and Hull's 2016 study, although undoubtedly crafted from years of research with fathers (Palkovitz, 1997; Palkovitz, 2002; Palkovitz and Hull, 2018), is a comprehensive list of resources that does not go in to detail into how these resources are played out over a period of time.

By using narrative inquiry as a mechanism for understanding identity capital, the focus moves from identity capital resources being held inside of a person's mind to within the stories of the relationships between people and their worlds. In a conversation with Gergen (Aceros, 2012), Gergen stipulates that narrative research is one of the superior ways in which researchers can explore how others construct their identity or self in light of the relational. Narrative identity research is based on viewing identity as a life story (McAdams, 2015). The life story can be described as 'a special kind of story about how people come to be the people they are and are becoming' (McAdams, 2018, p. 364). Relational forces mediate such identities, but identity belongs to the fathers in this study. They are not passive recipients of identity capital, nor is identity capital in the possession of others. A timeline of the change in philosophical thinking and construction of identity capital during this study can be found in Appendix 3.

## Fathers living in areas of disadvantage: Human capital

This section considers how human capital has been at the forefront of policy aimed at fathers who live in areas of disadvantage, policies that use the ideology of work and employment as ways of moving out of disadvantage, and how this may influence the identity capital experiences of fathers in these areas.

For Côté's work (Côté, 1997, 2016; Côté and Levine 2016) human capital is the *hard* type of resources like workplace skills and formal credentials needed to enable a successful life course. Historically, human capital describes the use of physical assets, experience (Pigou, 1928; Kiker, 1966), learning, skills, and training as a prerequisite for economic growth (Benhabib and Spiegel, 1994). The definition of human capital has become more personalised and 'holistic' in recent years, measuring the 'knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being' (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). However, it is still used to measure the growth of the economy and relates to the skills and number of people within labour workforce (Office of National Statistics, 2016). Human capital data is also relatively easy to collect. However, there are criticisms in using the term human in conjunction with capital because of the association with taking advantage of the toil of human beings to make a profit (Marx, 1887; Tan, 2014; Mill, 1909). Human capital was also the German 'Un-word' of 2004 because of such connotations (Bruce-Lockhart, 2016).

Human capital resources play a significant role in the way agencies connect with fathers in areas of disadvantage. Employment and education for employment play an integral role in tackling poverty and disadvantage. Most fathers who are targeted by such initiatives are seen as far away from the labour market with multiple 'barriers' to employment such as lack of confidence, low self-esteem and motivation and/or 'indirect' barriers such as care responsibilities and financial hardship (Daguerre and Etherington, 2009). Some initiatives with a high focus on employment in the highest areas of disadvantage and poverty have not been as successful as anticipated (see Welsh Government, 2017b), such as the Communities First initiatives (Communities First, and Genesis2, a European Social Funded project (SQW, 2014 see also Welsh Government 2018c). Currently, Families First, the Welsh Government



fund to tackle child poverty and which supports Flying Start, Communities First and The Integrated Family Support Service use employment as part of their outcome measurements to show changes in poverty levels for parents in areas of disadvantage and poverty (Welsh Government, 2014a). Although not mentioning capital per se, the outcomes relate to human capital in general as end goals as part of the aims towards sustainable economies.

In non-Communities First areas, the Parents, Childcare, and Employment (PaCE) 2016 currently supports parents into training or employment where there are problems with childcare (Allies and Irving, 2016). Communities for Work (CfW) has been initiated by the Welsh Government in West and East Wales and the Valleys in Communities First areas which also incorporate Flying Start areas. CfW uses mentors such as Parent Employment Advisers from Job Centre Plus, workers from Local Authorities and Lead Delivery Bodies. Many are situated in Integrated Family Centres within such communities and aim to support both direct and indirect barriers to employment by targeting parents who use the centres. The intention is to tackle poverty by aiming for 'sustainable employment' (Welsh Government, 2014a, p.62; Welsh Government, 2014a, p.50). However, the term within these initiatives is quite ambiguous at present. First impressions of the term create a picture of promoting the aim to secure well paid, supported, and lengthy employment for participants. Wales statistics on in-work poverty are higher than the national average and continue to increase (Tinson and MacInnes, 2015). Insecure and low paid jobs are more common for people who are at risk of poverty (Barnes and Lord, 2013). There is little longitudinal research on how many parents go back on benefits after being in employment in such areas; however, employment and retention is known as an issue for certain groups such as lone parents (Newton and Burrowes, 2017). 'Sustainable' has been implied by the Well Being of Future Generations Act (2015) as the:

...percentage of people in employment, who are on permanent contracts (or on temporary contracts, and not seeking permanent employment) and who earn more than 2/3 of the UK median wage. (Welsh Government, 2016, p. 2).

However, Communities for Work has not yet defined 'sustainable employment' in such terms (Mylona, 2017, personal correspondence, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017). 'Sustainable employment' is seen not just as the time, length or quality of the job offered, but suggests that it is concerned with progression when in secure jobs (National Assembly for Wales, 2016), as well as the resources and personality strengths, such as self-confidence, efficacy, and resilience needed for the labour market (Newton, *et al.*, 2016). It has also been described as the resources needed when faced with life changes such as redundancy or job losses (Newton and Burrowes, 2017). Therefore, on the one hand, Welsh Government accepts the vision of well paid, secure, and quality jobs, but must also manage initiatives that define 'sustainable' in a less structured way. It must also accept the reality of low paid, insecure employment without measuring progress in such areas. The new Prosperity for All strategy (Welsh Government, 2017b) aimed at developing a new Employability Plan intends to create a highly trained and inclusive workforce. However, there is an acknowledgment that uncertainty around leaving the European Union (Welsh Government, 2018) as this may affect the ability to deliver many of the projects funded via the European Social Fund (ESF).

It is still not evident whether or not the employment outcomes for Communities for Work or PaCE participants (which undoubtedly would include fathers) records the type, amount and quality of work within the outcomes. This would include zero-hour contracts, volunteering, low paid manual and menial work, quality of support within the workplace, length of the trial period, etc., as it is not needed by ESF and related bodies. These issues are considered as having knock-on effects in relation to in-work poverty for families (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014; Guy, 2013), which include parents being worse off for taking short term contract jobs as their benefits stop after termination. At present, CfW outcomes only measure the destinations of participants immediately after leaving CfW. A recent independent evaluation of PaCE, suggests that the employment outcomes for 20 percent of parents who participate in the initiative may be difficult to achieve (Wavehill and Wavehill, 2016). This is not new in terms of outcomes specifically associated with human capital results, including recent initiatives that have been aborted. For fathers on the receiving end of such initiatives, this may lead to difficulties and stress in their lives because of such complexity in employment and uncertainty of contracts.

In specifically related discourse, Hicks (1973) believed human capital is always in relation to social and personal structures (Cunningham, 2004). It can be argued as based on utilitarian ideals where one's employment credentials are more important (Fevre, *et al.*, 1999) than the ability to have a role in society. For fathers in general, there are numerous barriers to employment in areas of disadvantage. These include a prevailing discourse to see men as family providers (Martins, *et al.*, 2014; Miller, 2011a; Winlow, 2001; Pleck and Levine, 2002; Lamb, *et al.*, 1987. However, there is a changing discourse of men as breadwinners (Honeyman, 2000; O'Brien, 2016), which is reported as being a significant pressure on working-class men (Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne, 2016). In addition, men are reported as becoming increasingly more likely to stay at home to tend to their children, whilst their partner works (King, 2011; McVeigh, 2012). In areas of disadvantage, this may be described as economic inactivity, with 24.3% of men in England (no data for Wales), stating they were economically inactive because they were looking after the family home. Lone parent fathers are more likely to state that they are economically inactive due to sickness or disability (42.1% of fathers and 19.7% others) compared to couples (Office for National Statistics, 2018). This narrative feeds into the continuing workforce changes that have been happening over the past 30 years in the South Wales area. Further explanations on changes in the workforce for men and the use of terms such as 'economic inactivity' can be found in Rob's narrative in Chapter 5.

It could be suggested that policies related to fathers in areas of disadvantage have played into the prevailing discourse of concentrating on human capital as the prevalent resource for improving the lives of fathers in areas of disadvantage. In society, if a fathers' social space changes, such as losing temporary contracted or zero-hour employment, or being a stay at home and an arguably more involved father, then so does their identity within their society (Fevre, *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, the change of identity could be seen as influencing ways in which macro constructions such as organisations promote the narrative of primary concern for human capital and employment equaling a route out of disadvantage.

## Fathers living in areas of disadvantage: social capital

Changing the definition of identity capital for this study has posed a dilemma in terms of its previous descriptions of a symbiotic relationship with social capital. For some time, it was frustrating as I questioned whether this new definition of identity capital based in the relational (Gergen, 2009) was indeed social capital *in disguise*. There are similarities between social capital and identity capital, and there is an agreement for this study that there is a symbiotic relationship between each (Schuller and Watson, 2009; Côté, 1997). Identity and social capital rely on social elements for resources; however, for this study, they present as positioned in distinct ways. It can be argued that the focus of social capital still considers resources of a person as an internal and individualised issue rather than a relational one and that it also has strong leanings in research and policy towards economic sustainability and employment. Social capital can be seen as still focussed on a person and their individualised and autonomous potential (Atkinson, *et al.*, 2019), “what they can get from social interactions” rather than a co-active response (Gergen, 2015), or being part of an ‘intersubjective understanding’ (Burkitt, 2016, p. 326). By thinking about the relational, it ‘flips the switch, as it were, from seeing individuals as forging relationships to viewing multiple relationships as forging individuals’ (White, 2017, p. 129). Additionally, it can be argued that social capital focusses on connotations of power and influence as well as the positive aspects of sociability (Portes, 1998). At a time where there is a surge of interest in research of the complexity theories and ecological models (White, 2017), it is difficult to pinpoint ideas of power, influence or sociability alone as having the precedence over other modes of thought. Identity capital, as described for this study, is not invested in these concepts, nor is the idea of the bounded being in need of resources from their social environments. Identity capital offers a different perspective whereby the *self* is seen can only be seen through the relationships with others, which is choreographed by a sense of co-action. As Gergen (2011, p.137) suggests, this allows for ‘enormous possibilities of being.’

Simply defined, social capital refers to ‘capital from the social point of view’ (Marshall, 1890 p.60). Capital, in this sense, is the ‘social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (Putnam, 1995, p. 64-65). These networks, norms, and trust, could lead to future acquirement of human and

identity capital, but also sets it apart from it (Coleman, 1988). There are criticisms of the term social capital due to its lack of clarity in definition, with different authors assigning various meanings to the term (Durlauf, 1999). There is an unease in using economic terms (gain, assets, capital, value etc.) to describe the benefits that come from relationships among people, (Miller, 1998; Tikkanen, 2016; Sollow, 2000) and the lack of reference to context and the passage of time (people and places change therefore so do the capital) when making generalisations as to its composition (Skocpol, 2003). There have also been calls for a narrower definition of the term (Woolcock, 1998; Lynch, *et al.*, 2001; Fisher, 2009) so that sceptics and supporters can adhere to the same rules and focus on what social capital *is* rather than what it *does* (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

Social capital can be related to the increase in economic gain through social networks. Who you know and how you act, look and behave allows a way to integrate social groups that allow a person to accumulate wealth and success. It is reasoned that a person with more connections and advantages (such as those in dominant classes) have more access to social capital and can live a wealthier life because of it. It is thought to be more difficult for people of a different class or social grouping to succeed because they do not share the networks, norms, and trust of certain dominant groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Waquant, 2005). For example, research shows parents are instrumental in their social networking choices, making conscious choices to join school parents' associations to benefit themselves and their children (Bagnell, *et al.*, 2003), whereas parents from poorer communities seem not to make such instrumental choices (Gilles and Edwards, 2006). This is relevant to fathers in this study in terms of how their parents were able to encourage this form of social capital, and how they also encourage it in their fathering roles with their own children. Social capital can also refer to more '(positive) social control' (Dika and Singh, 2002, p. 34), irrespective of social class whereby it can 'called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain' (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000, p. 226). High levels of bonding social capital (strong ties in neighbourhood/family unity, trust, and participation) (Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998) and bridging social capital, (where different social groups exchange information, and create a stronger radius of network norms and trust (Fukuyama, 1999), are said to create advantages for a person and the community in which they live (Putnam, 2000). This includes higher levels of wellbeing and health (Helliwell, 2003; Poortinga, 2006). Linking social capital refers to the

way in which communities network with agencies and organisations and political structures to bring each other closer together (Warren, *et al.*, 2001). In terms of the study, ideas of bonding, bridging and linking social capital can be related to micro and macro social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Katz, *et al.*, 2007), whereby micro constructions in individual and community levels influence macro responses and vice versa. It is proposed that a lack of social capital exacerbates issues related to poverty and disadvantage in communities (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Santini and De Pascale, 2012; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Poortinga and Suffolk, 2011; Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005; Rothstein, 2005). It is also suggested policy uses social capital as an answer to build and repair communities of disadvantage and poverty where individualisation, fragmented families, different forms of family structures, declining and alienated communities and neighbourhoods, and forms of social exclusion are seen as prevalent (Edwards and Gillies, 2005, p. 5; Baron, Field, and Schuller, 2002; Gamarnikow and Green, 1999). A close family network is seen as important for wellbeing (Calhoun, 1994) providing these structures are healthy and supportive. If not, it may be that living apart from close family ties, makes it easier for people to carve their own identities (Côté and Levine, 2016), even for parents. Within parenting support, environment social exclusion and isolation are general themes parents present whilst using parenting services (Moran, *et al.*, 2004; Welsh Government, 2014a; Katz, *et al.*, 2007), and attendance in parenting groups has been claimed to increase social capital (Fielden and Ghallagher, 2008). This is a form of linking social capital, whereby organisations fit their outcomes (such as policy-driven parenting programmes) to the needs of parents. However, in terms of social capital, parenting, or in this study, 'fathering' 'norms and practices are not developed through conscious learning and coercion' (Edwards and Gillies, 2005, p. 5). They are part of the every-day lived-in experiences of fathers in their social settings. Commonly known as 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1986), these everyday experiences can be described as the way society becomes 'deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Waquant, 2005 p.316). Common assumptions in policy are that areas of disadvantage and poverty are characterised by a discrepancy in social capital (Gillies and Edwards, 2006). However, this is not necessarily the case for those living in communities of disadvantage. New forms of social capital, such as online support and friendships as well as community or neighbourhood networks are important for fathers and may be 'invisible' to organisations

who continue to look at social capital through traditional routes (Cherti, 2008 p.186 ). In fact, it is suggested that the success of linking social capital is only as effective as the processes, objectives and practices of the individual or organisation that attempts to create it (Cherti, 2008). There is a chance that fathers who attend Dad's groups are passive recipients of social capital (Holland, *et al.*, 2007; Smylie, 2015) due to having to attend groups where actions and interventions rely on to doing *to* fathers rather than *with* them (Wachtel and McCold, 2001).

### Agency and the relational

Agency is important to consider in this study because the positioning of fathers and the grand narrative discourses that reflect that a father's capacity to act is related to their own choices in life. As discussed previously, the ability for fathers to act and choose their resources run through neoliberal policy and ideology. This has currently relied on social capital and human capital as ideologies that enable communities of disadvantage and poverty to be repaired or changed in light of structural norms within society. It can be proposed that there are barriers to thinking that people can choose to act in ways that a collective (such as government, community, or families) think that humans should act as a specific given time. These relate to arguments that agency, like *self*, can be found inside of a person, or whether it is a structural force, which mediates a person's response.

Traditionally, social theory described the agency as a person's capacity to 'act...on their own behalf, either individually or collectively' (Angel, 2011, p. 633 see also Ritzer, 2008). Agency as a concept has been closely linked to the contradictory views of individual freedom to make their own and stable social order. This is defined as the *agency v structure* debate (Dépelteau, 2008). Agency, such as in Côté's work, is positioned as belonging to a person, intrinsically, inside of them, and is part of conscious choice and of reflexive thought (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1979; Burkitt, 2016). Structure refers to the factors that promote or hinder a persons ability to act with agency. These are not limited to institutions or laws but are also characteristic structures in society, such as social class, age, gender, ethnicity, genetics, etc. (Barker, 2005; see also Giddens, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2010; Bandura, 1999; Marx, 1859/ 1978;

Durkheim, 2001 [1897]). It is argued that the way in which agency is situated in constant relation to structure is not necessary, especially if agency is seen as a relational force outside of a person's mind, and within the interdependent networks of people and organizations (Gergen, 2009, 2015; Burkitt, 2016). As Butler suggests, 'there need not be a doer behind the deed' (Butler, 1990, p. 147).

The term 'agent' or 'actor' denotes the action of a person that produces an effect on the social world (Burkitt, 2016). These actions consist of the idea that agency starts with being reflexive and consciously choosing an action based on a set of circumstances (Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1979; 1984). An Aristotelian concept, this description of agency comes from the idea that there is an active force within a person that is responsible for this action, and these actions are said to be intentional (Anscombe, 1957; Davidson, 1980). During the Enlightenment, this active force, or 'soul,' became known as conscious intent, and agentic intentions were based on moral decisions that for some, produced not just sin, but a crime (Gergen, 2009). This idea of agency reflects on the similar narratives constructed for fathers, and that moral decisions and responsibility for their actions is based solely at the feet of fathers.

Agency has been considered as a cognitive ability present from birth due to the idea that infants possess internal sensations within their own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) which they then use to voice their 'views in order to be heard, to persuade, and to move others into action' (Pufall and Unsworth, 2004, p. 4; *see also* Fodor, 1975). However, it can also be argued that agency is not 'in the head' of a child (Gergen, 2009, p.80). As Donati; stipulates: 'in the beginning is the relation' (Donati, 2011, p. 17), in which an interrelational myriad of gestures, looks, and interaction that happens between them and their close caregivers (Trevathern, 2005; Stern, 1985). The 'intersubjective understanding' (Burkitt, 2016, p. 326) between people, is said to be the 'very knot of relations' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945 /2012, p. xxxv). For example, a father can take an active role in their children's upbringing, not because of a conscious decision and internal dialogue, but because of relationships that surround them. This is not due to 'an action or reaction, but a coordinated action', a *co-action* (Gergen, 2015, p. 155), between people that enable such relationships to happen.



Reflexivity can be seen as one element of agency and therefore, it could be argued as an internal construction. It can also be seen as the way in which internal conversation allows consideration of a person in 'relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer, 2007, p. 4), where the internal conversation deliberates about society, instead of within society (Dépelteau, 2008). Nonetheless, this need not be a completely mentally situated concept. Rather than see reflexivity as a way in which people *think* of their relation to others (Archer, 2012), it can be re-envisioned as a way of describing what *they do* in relation to others (Burkitt, 2016). It is argued that reflexivity is only one element of agency and emphasis on thought neglects habitual day to day activities, as well as relational, and on times, acted upon due to deep emotional ties to others (Duncan, 2015; Pham, 2013; Burkitt, 2012; Holmes, 2010). Therefore, reflexivity may play a part in the way in which action is chosen, but, it is not the crux of the interrelation between an individual and the structure of society. A person is not an entity that stands alone, looking at the canyon between them and the structure of society as a whole, but part of a relational dance that mediates the amount of agency available to them.

The discussion has centered on the ability to see agency as not residing inside a person's mind, but outside, in the relationships between people. Relationships and co-action are seen as central in agency for this study. Reflexivity, and the ability to think about and act on the relationship between a person and the social world is seen as only a part of the agency puzzle. It is easier to visualise relational aspects on a micro-level. However, it becomes more complex when trying to justify relational agency and the concept of structure. If structures describe the elements of institutions and laws, as well as structural aspects of social class, age, gender, etc., then it is difficult to conceive how an individual has relationships with such concepts. This is the first hurdle: viewing a person as separate from structure. It is common to think this way, as our world at present concentrates on 'hypertrophied kind of individualism' (Sugarman and Martin, 2011, p. 283) whereby there is a preoccupation with an individual's essence, (or soul, or conscience), which is seen as primary, and seen separate from a social world (Gergen, 2015). But this leads to a way of thinking that assumes people are self contained individuals living in isolation from others (Sampson, 1990). A father, by mere definition, points to a relationship with a child, but to become a father and to be part of fathering, requires the co-operation of others. To fit into narrative discourses that surround

being an active, involved, and providing father requires connections to not only micro but macro constructions. By splitting both agency and structure, a need emerges to look for cause and effect explanations of individual actions (Gergen, 2009). Macro-level social structures are only considered by splitting people into homogenous groups and unitary categories, for example, lone parents, fathers in crisis, out of work fathers, Muslims, victims of abuse. These categories are further enshrined by a preoccupation with pathological views of people living in areas of disadvantage and the inadequate ways in which people are perceived as having mediating factors and coping mechanisms (Titterton, 1992). This deterministic mechanical way of viewing structure underestimates the role of people within relationships (Pinnington and Schugurensky, 2010; Freire, 1995). For example, Burkitt (2016) describes this in Duncan's (2015) study of LAT couples (living apart together). The study suggested that it was not the structural aspects of organisations that prevented some women from living with their partners, but the relations to and with others. The relationships with such organisations are fluid and change with time. He adds: 'it is not others, as individuals or organizations, that constrain us but the nature of our relationships with them' (Burkitt, 2016 p.333).

The second hurdle is the positioning of power as part of a structural entity. Social structures are not single entities or individuals, because they are always part of complex social relations, be in interpersonal or within formal relations such as work and organisations (Burkitt, 2016). However, I believe that it would be ideological to think that these relations are of an equal footing. Within these roles, there are power imbalances where some will have more control of resources than others. This mediates our agency, but, power does not happen because of structures, but because of our interdependence with and on others (Elias, 1978). Actions will always impose costs or benefits to others. Interdependence does not make power obsolete. Patterns of interdependence are strongly linked to patterns of potential power resources (Keohane and Nye, 1987). The more dependent a person is on another individual or organisation, the more powerful that an individual becomes. This is different from structural issues of power, and once again positioning the issue of agency within the relational field of being.

The third hurdle is that the way in which the world is constructed could actively promote

this type of dualism. Even if it can be argued that the social world is socially constructed, in many aspects of society, this dualism holds ontological power. The positioning of agency as the interconnectedness and interrelational view is not common in aspects of policy that affect fathers. For example, in welfare to work policy, a persons agency is scrutinised through their motives and actions, rather than a consideration of relational proponents (Connor, 2011). For example, a hard-line is taken with benefit claimants, as their 'bad' agency is something to correct, be it with motivational action or punitive measures (Wright, 2012; Murray, 1994).

In conclusion, the concept of agency runs through most discourses associated with disadvantage. However, the concept of duality between agency and structure can be abandoned for one of relational agency (Gergen, 2009; 2015). The concept of agency as primarily an 'inner conversation' can be surrendered for one which favours intersubjective understanding and coordinated action. The concept moves from within a persons' mental processes, of what they *think*, to concentrate what they *do* (Burkitt, 2016). Reflexivity may be a part of agency, but more prominently habitual day to day action, relational ties and sometimes deep emotions relate to how a person acts either individually or collectively. By doing so, the focus moves from the individual to a relational player in the world which prevents a concentration on cause and effect and viewing individuals as part of homogenous groups and unitary categories, which underestimates the role of the relational. Power imbalances are inherent within relational agency. However, power is not because of societal structures, but an interdependence on others, be it people or macro organisations. The main problem with the view of agency being interrelational is that society is constructed to view the traditional dialogue of agency as part of the internal thought process and possessed by a person. For people who are dependant on the state for benefits, for example, this creates a problem as they are seen as agentic and should be part of a society that they live. If they do not conform to societies standards or moral needs, they are seen as having 'bad' agency, and this can be viewed as something to be corrected, be it with motivation or punitive measures. Thus, although this study situates itself within the interrelational aspect of agency, there is a need to evoke a sense of subtle realism due to the way in which society is socially constructed. Both micro and macro social constructions will be considered, but the focus will be on the interrelational aspect of the fathers' stories.

This chapter has considered the literature that frames the approach to the research as well as considerations as to how fathers are perceived in society. This relates to a change of political ideology, called neoliberalism, how they are supported in community groups and whether their fatherhood practices are impacted by hegemonic fatherhood; a term used to describe the way fathers may not be able to reach societal ideals of fatherhood. Focusing on identity capital allows for an exploration of the resources that are available to men to be the fathers they want to be. Identity capital is also compared and synthesized with human and social capital. It also considers ideas of agency in the relational, which will enable identity capital resources in the fathers' narrative life stories as part of relationships with others and society as a whole. This allows for a different type of perspective on fathers who live in areas of disadvantage and considers the ways in which relationship constructions may influence their ability to use their identity capital to effect.

## Chapter 3: The Pilot Study

This chapter considers the pilot study and the issues that arose from the choices made at the start of the journey. It considers how my first choice of focus group interviews and one to one interviews highlighted a number of barriers in method and approach that made me reconsider my choices. The pilot study enabled a dramatic shift in the way in which the research was conducted, as well as its design and its focus. This was also the time in which the conceptual development of identity capital and its philosophical underpinnings were considered, and the methodological tensions arose as the result of semi-structured interview questions.

At the start of the pilot study journey, my research questions were quite broad and focussed on the issues around development and change and practice in parenting groups:

My initial research questions were:

1. How do parents who attend parenting groups understand the concept of identity capital?
2. To what extent are there aspects of change or continuity in identity capital for parents involved in parenting groups?
3. Are there any implications for those facilitating parenting groups arising from the study?

The research pilot started in November 2016 and finished in November 2017. Initially, the pilot was to be delivered over two months, concentrating on my initial choice of methodology, which was participatory methods of data collection in a focus group. One to one interviews were also conducted with two parents from the group, Violet\* and Amber\*. The Parenting Team from Flying Start areas suggested parents who may be interested in the study and I contacted them. The timeline for the pilot study can be seen in Figure 2. During

the interviews, there was a dramatic change in the conceptual and methodological design by which I endeavoured to conduct the study, and this led to an extended period of inquiry. Please note that I use the term parents and participants interchangeably. As my knowledge of social constructionism and qualitative interviewing developed, I took an opportunity to interview a further two people, Holly and Scott, between April and May 2017. I subsequently developed a clearer understanding of the description of identity capital, and the use of the interview method suggested of the Biographical Narrative Interpretation Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2004) became apparent.

I contacted Tom Wengraf, author of the BNIM guide (2004) in July to enhance my questioning and reflexive abilities. Between July and September 2017, I used five close friends to practice small scale interviews to explore the technique, create transcriptions, and organise reflexive journals. As a result, this, I felt confident enough to pilot the BNIM and used two further parents to practice the interview method. In November of 2017, I attended a BNIM study week with Tom Wengraf and Prue Chamberlayne, where transcriptions of the interviews were used to explore analytical frameworks relevant to the study. The pilot process took a long time, but the journey helped me to understand the conceptual and methodological choices that suited the study and helped me to position myself effectively as a researcher using BNIM as an interview method and later, a different analytical framework.

### Timeline for pilot study

#### Focus group interview:

7 mothers Flying Start parenting group: November 2016

#### One to one interviews:

Violet\* and Amber\* semi-structured community setting interview  
November- January 2017

Holly\* and Scott\* community setting interview partial narrative  
interviews to BNIM– February – April 2017

#### Short 20 minute friend interviews home setting BNIM:

Taryn\* July 2017

Lana\* July 2017

Charlie\* August 2017

Michael\* August 2017

#### Full BNIM interviews home and community setting:

Kelly\* September 2017

Diana\* September 2017

BNIM Study week London with Tom Wengraf – November 1-8<sup>th</sup>

*Figure 2: Timeline for pilot study*

## The focus group interview

At this time, I had only access to female parenting Groups. I had identified a group of female parents who were currently attending a parenting group in a Flying Start school, as people who may be able to assist me in my study. At this point, the concept of 'identity capital' was ambiguous, where I relied upon the pre-definitions and words from other studies (see Côté, 1997; 2002; 2005; Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Côté and Levine, 2016). My description of identity capital resources related to continuity and change during the life process as underpinned by the work of Bateson, G. (1973); Bateson, M.C. (1994), Caspi and Roberts (2001), Cherim (2005), Gioia, (1998), and Geertz (1995). I showed the parents a diagram to explain the concept (Figure 3).

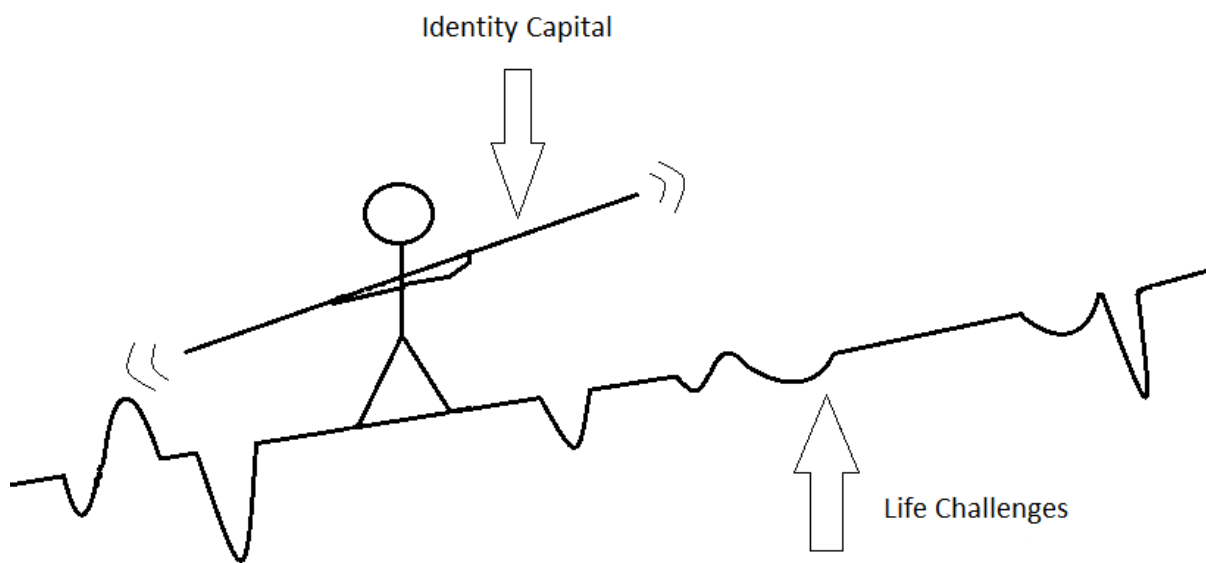


Figure 3: Identity capital resources related to continuity and change during the life process

I was finding the theoretical descriptions of identity capital difficult to simplify, but I described it as the *'assets or resources a person uses during life challenges or changes'*. It became apparent that the academic interpretation of identity capital and the translation to real-life language was a stumbling point. I was anxious as it was my first interview, and this anxiety led me to be rigid in my academic language. This was apparent when one of the participants in the group said, "can you say that in plain English?" I had confused them,



making it difficult for them to relate the question to real-life situations. Similarly, to Chase (2003a), who reiterates Sacks' (1989) study, my abstraction of such talk made them disconnected from their real-life situations in which they lived. Methodologically, I was restricted in my choice of data collection. I had an interest in participatory methods (Mills, 2002), and I was adept at using them, having used them in my work experiences in community development and parenting groups. I had also used it in my postgraduate studies to elicit conversation to advantageous effect (Pitman, 2014). However, I came to realise that this method did not allow me to respond to the research questions. I based the session on discussions around several pictures representing both micro and macro influences on a person's identity, underpinned by the work of Burr (2003) and Bronfenbrenner (1979)(Figure 4).



*Figure 4: Using tried and tested 'comfortable' methods do not always give the best results*

Unfortunately, whole design of the research pilot was not as I had envisaged. Firstly, I underestimated the unique positioning of parents within the focus group. They each came with their own problems, both resolved and unresolved in terms of crisis. Furthermore,

although participation was voluntary, the inability to truly disengage from an already established group may have proven difficult for some. I also felt uneasy leaving the group parenting facilitator with some unresolved statements for the group due to my questioning. I reflected that the design of the focus group was for *my* ease. It did not sufficiently answer the pre-existing research questions, nor did it offer a chance for some to talk in-depth about their experiences. What concerned me most was the feeling of entering a space, collecting data and leaving, without following up appointments in line with their stories. Therefore, I chose not to use any of the data collected and not use this research encounter as part of the project.

### The conceptual development of identity capital for the study

I continued with the two one-to-one semi-structured interviews with members of the group, Violet and Amber. I was able to pinpoint two specific tensions in the interviews; one related to describing identity capital using cognitive constructs (Côté, 1997; 2002; 2005; Côté and Schwartz, 2002; Côté and Levine, 2016), the other was with identity capital only relating to times of change and continuity. Initially, I used Côté's descriptors of identity capital, such as confidence, self-esteem, and locus of control, as triggers to ask further questions if they were discussed in replies to questions. At this point, there was an emphasis on using deductive triggers as a natural response to qualitative inquiry. However, using such psychological and conceptual words as "triggers", led a superficial understanding, rather than an in-depth inquiry (Wengraf, 2004). This also happened with words that transcended both academic/psychological and day-to-day language such as *strength* (see figure 5). Evidently, it can be argued that the method of questioning could also account for the lack of depth in responses (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014). However, there are specific highlighted problems in using cognitive psychological constructs such as confidence, self-esteem, and locus of control (or even strength) as triggers for inquiry. Apart from being language that may not be used in day to day life, it concentrates on a subjective, reductionist explanation. Such constructs can be deemed misleading (Skinner, 1989; Coulter, 1989), impersonal, intellectualised, and

excessively abstract (Still and Costall 1991) and therefore fail to consider the experiences of the research participants. In Violet's interview, this became all too apparent (see Figure 5).

A parent may talk about strength, self-esteem, or confidence, but it may not be rendered meaningful taken out of the social context (Gergen, 1994), and is not the focus of this study. For the focus of this research, using decontextualised ideas of identity capital fails to consider the basic principles of social constructionism, such as relationships, culture, and the exploration of the way people define the world around them. Furthermore, discussions with others on the definition of identity capital as *assets or resources a person uses during life challenges or changes*, may also not be a detailed enough description of identity capital for this study. Resources are used by people irrespective of change. Resources may be more pronounced or conscious in a person's reflection during times of crisis. However, they are still evident in day to day life. This confirmed that an easier to understand, and specific description was needed to focus on the philosophical underpinning of the research; social constructionism, where the focus needed to be concentrated on the resources mediated by *relationships*, both on a micro and macro scale and which is evident from the description of identity capital for this study. It also became evident that I was unable to answer the three initial research questions. The first was difficult to answer due to the complexity of conceptual description and the ambiguity in asking parents to understand an academic definition of identity capital. The second question became obsolete with the redefining of identity capital. The third, which may have been possible, took the focus to workplaces and support workers rather than highlighting the experiences of the parents. At the end of the pilot, one research question was chosen, which focuses on the construction of identity capital in the narrative life stories of parents.

### Methodological tensions – from “jumpy” questions and answers to BNIM

Qualitative interviewing and its techniques are sometimes taken for granted (Brinkmann, 2013). At the start of the pilot, I was using a semi-structured interview design but was failing to take into consideration what information was important for my research (Rubin and Rubin,

2011). As Gubrium and Holstein, (1997) suggest, there is a misconception that asking a 'correct' question will stimulate a 'correct' answer. This is especially poignant within the social constructionist inquiry. There is a distinct epistemological difference in the way in which interviews are designed, and data is collected, depending on the way in which knowledge is perceived. Whilst I knew the study was situated in a social constructionist approach, I was using questions which related to existing cognitive constructs that may have very different meanings to the parent than to a psychological definition. This was an error in understanding. Likewise, although it is common in an interview process to use inductive and deductive approaches (Wengraf, 2004), I regarded knowledge as something to be 'mined', looking for 'nuggets' of knowledge to fit my pre-existing descriptors, rather than a journey which is constructed during the data collection and analysis process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This can be seen in the example of my pilot interview with Violet in Figure 5.

**Interview 1: "Violet" - STRENGTH**

**lines: 175-186**

*V: yeah, I miss my dad and all that but I think it done me the world of good. Yeah, brought me strength.*

*J: Strength keeps ...*

*V: Yeah, I want strength tattooed on my arm*

*J: So, what does this strength mean to you then?*

*V: I'm so passionate about strength!!*

*J: Tell me more...*

*V:( laughing) I dunno, I'm just so passionate about this and I'm still here and I know... everyone said you're stronger than you think and all this. and I thought. I am strong...but it takes me a lot to realise that I'm strong.*

*J: How do you know you are strong?*

*V: Cos I haven't jumped in front of a train!*

Figure 5: Mining for nuggets (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) in semi-structured interviews

In transcribing the interviews, I noted that the way in which the interview flowed was “jumpy”. I was more concerned with covering the aspect of a pre-prepared semi-structured question schedule. I was also conscious of the time restraints, and this self-talk and anxiety led me to miss some quite profound incident points within the text. This, coupled with the development of the concept, disabled me from hearing and responding appropriately. The transcription jumped from one topic to another, with me, the researcher, guiding the way. The question of what was the purpose of the interview was a constant agitator. During my next two interviews, there was a shift in terms of the methodology and methods in the interview. Holly and Scott were a couple who agreed to meet me individually. I was conscious that my previous interviews had been of a conversational style, keen to show some regard to the notion of an active interview process (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Hootkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Kvale, 1996), or of co-action (Gergen, 2015). However, this led me to take it a little too literally and there were times in which the interview read more like a conversation, possibly in part due to anxiety about my first few interviews. It can be argued that interviews share many attributes of an ordinary conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 2011) where there is ‘considerable communicative reciprocity and collaboration in interviewing’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012, p. 35), where data is produced wherever there are utterances, or a series of speech exchanges (Mishler, 1986). However, this form of interviewing did not allow for an in-depth exploration of experience. Although both Violet and Amber were willing to share information, they tended to generalise their experiences in this type of format. It was evident that I was not going to use an analysis that may place emphasis on language and conversation as a clear route to a persons’ subjectivity. The purpose of this research is not to create limited codeable inferences based on behaviour and pre-established categories of meaning (Bolton, *et al.*, 2005). Neither would I be ‘mining’ for words that were used in previous conceptual ideas of identity capital. Using the interview for coding, I felt strips meaning from the socio-relational aspect of the participant’s story (Holloway and Jefferson, 2009; Mishler, 1986). As discussed previously, this study is not situated solely in the inquiry of the subjective, cognitive descriptors of identity capital. This research is based on the inquiry into the complexity of relational resources, which has not previously been explored.

In Holly and Scott’s interview, I chose to sit back, say less, and allow the participant to talk more freely. I chose to limit the pressure of following a pre-prepared semi-structured

interview schedule and use more “tell me about...” prompting questions. This was a lightly structured interview, telling them what I was studying and asking about themselves. Using such an approach led to stories of specific in-depth life events in more detail. There was also a shift in the way the interview looked when transcribed. There were large chunks of talk assigned to the participant, which included long accounts of past, present and sometimes future narratives. By allowing a free reign in the interview, without pressing my own conceptual ideas of what identity capital may be, enabled the participant to take the lead, which in turn, led to a range of life story experiences. I concluded that I wished to look at the narrative life stories of the participants in more detail, rather than relying on semi-structured pre-defined questions of my own making, which fitted some pre-defined conceptual idea of identity capital. These questions make assumptions about knowledge and reality that are based on the pre-existing knowledge of the researcher and fail to take into account that the participant is a whole being, with different epistemological constructions. Using life stories changes the focus from a ‘knowledge-privileged investigator’ to a semi-passive participant in a story telling process (Jones, 2004, p. 36). This led to the inquiry taking a biographical narrative turn. Using a biographical (a whole life history or story) narrative method (how they tell it) (Corbally and O’Neill, 2014) allows investigations into the personal and the socio-cultural world of the participant (Ricoeur, 1981) and their interconnections (Chamberlayne and King, 2000). Using such an approach led to life stories of specific moments in more in-depth detail and assumes that each parents’ story is a constructed whole and far more illuminating than any pre-determined question or assumption (Jones, 2001). However, at this point the biographical narrative interviews still lacked a predefined structure.

Holly was a shy and quiet person, a little nervous, and found talking difficult. In Holly’s interview, I used an opening of “tell me about your life”, but noted I unconsciously filled a pause in her story by asking emotional “how did that make you think-feel...?” questions. This is a common question technique used in my previous role as a parenting worker but is based on a psychoanalytical framework. I believed that my primary role as a researcher was to ask questions during the interview (Holloway and Jefferson, 2009), and if I did not, I was somehow failing in my role. These interruptions, more often than not, led to an on-the-surface generalisation rather than a narrative (Wengraf, 2004). In addition, asking such questions during a narrative interview does not give credit to a person who is perfectly able

to tell what they want within the interview space (Edwards and Holland, 2013). For example, on telling me her story, which included details of Scott's breakdown, Holly gave me an account of how difficult it was being pregnant and alone. When I asked her about how she felt during this time, the answer immediately resorted to subjective cognitive descriptions: "devastated" "angry", without much content. Although there are arguments to suggest that describing ourselves using psychologically available terms enables us to create self-clarification (Sugarman and Martin, 2011), Holly's story appeared to jump from a rich, detailed description to decontextualized words, and the words stood alone from their socio-cultural meaning in the narrative. In addition, by asking such questions, I am making a presupposition that Holly is not self-aware and lacks agency to tell me what she thinks or feels in her story. My interruption did not give me any more knowledge than Holly's narrative about the relational aspects of identity capital. Also, if Holly wished to tell me about her emotions during this time, it is likely that she would have just told me in recounting her experience. Therefore, I questioned my use of such interruptions in the interview.

### The turn to BNIM

Scott had a diagnosis of high functioning Asperger's with an IQ of 140 and enjoyed talking at length. However, Scott's style of narrative led to a large outpouring of story. One section was 3,000 words long, and he talked solidly for an hour and fifteen minutes as I wrote down points of interest but with minimal interruption. The amount of narrative and the points of interest in his story overwhelmed me. I felt like a rudderless ship, unable to organise my interview due to the sheer volume of data as narrative. I started studying the work of Rosenthal (2004) and Holloway and Jefferson (2000), underpinned by Schütze (1976; 1977; 1983). This led me to discover the Biographical Narrative Interpretation Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000), which constitutes a method and a methodology. Its history originates from the studies of Rosenthal (1998, 2004) and Schütze (1977) which uses 'inter-narrative prompts', without directing the interview on to a chosen topic of the researcher (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p. 103) (see further explanation in Chapter 4). I worked with Tom Wengraf via email during this time to explore the method of interviewing in more detail. I used five friends for a micro interview and two full interviews

with mothers who were willing to be interviewed from the parenting team and to allow me to fully experience and explore the type of BNIM questioning (more on this interviewing technique in this chapter Stage 4: The Interviews) . This was far more difficult than was imagined for someone who had been used to believing they needed to talk in an interview setting. The experience was incredibly useful in so far as to allow me space to consider how to use reflexivity to log immediately after interviews, during transcription and post transcription observations for use in analysis. In November 2017, I attended the 5 day BNIM workshop run by Tom Wengraf which helped further with my training in the interview process and subsequent analysis. I took transcriptions of interviews that I had previously undertaken to use as practice. During this time, I realised that the analytical interpretation section of the BNIM interview method was situated in critical realism. This contradicted the position of the study, and therefore the analytical and interpretation section of the BNIM method was discarded, but the interview method was kept. More information can be found in Chapter 4. It was at this point that I was unexpectedly faced with an opportunity to work with fathers rather than mothers in the study and decided to focus this study on fathers and to adopt one to one interviews.

Time given to the pilot the study was incredibly useful. It enabled me to consider what was needed to broaden my understanding of identity capital as well as step out of my comfort zone and try new research methods. Being reflexive and I was able to move from “jumpy” questions to a more flowing and richer type of interview and work towards understanding the role of narrative interviewing for this study. By experimenting with open ended “tell me more about” questions, Holly’s interview came alive, but closed down when I tried to be more specific her answers became subjective and cognitive descriptors full of decontextualised words. My turn to BNIM in Scott’s interview allowed for richer detail and more in-depth exploration of experience of identity capital resources in the narrative. The next chapter focusses on this in more detail and looks at the ontological and epistemological shifts needed in using narrative inquiry as a method for research.

However, learning and changing decisions did not only happen at this point but happened throughout the research process. The pilot study also offered an opportunity to build relationships with parenting teams, which enabled me to make a choice to work solely with fathers for the study which was not considered at the start of the research journey. This



highlighted to me the amount of time and work needed at this point in the research journey and showed that the pilot study is not a part of the research process to be taken lightly.

## Chapter 4: Methodology/ Practices of inquiry

The chapter commences with a parable that explores the epistemological and ontological considerations that are imperative to any choices made in terms of methodological action. Similarly, within this chapter, there is a reference to 'lessons.' These show the way in which reflexivity throughout the methodological process mediated a change of thinking and action. This is important to highlight, as these are sometimes unsaid in research, as are decisions that are taken for granted as pre-planned. By doing so, I am attempting to relate to the reader who may want to conduct research in a similar fashion and may come across comparable hurdles in the research design. The chapter then discusses legitimisation through data collection. It considers the ethical dilemmas of reflexivity, positionality, and emotionality and the lessons along the research process journey. Please note that I have omitted the names of the fathers within these reflexivities of practice, as I was conscious that I had not obtained consent to talk about them prior to the research interview. The word 'narrator' is used interchangeably with the 'participant' and 'father' to denote father's contribution to the methodological journey. The chapter concludes by considering the analytical processes of this narrative inquiry.

It is worth noting that there is no definitive way of doing narrative research. Each research project has its own objectives, and each researcher has their own style and emotional connectivity with a project (Goodson and Sikes, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 1, traditional research terminology is used throughout the chapter. Gergen, (2014) postulates that using terms such as 'methodology' or 'methods' may signify a positivist and scientific view of research suggesting the term 'methods of research' to be replaced by 'practices of inquiry' (p.51). However, I am conscious that an audience that may be attracted to this research may be used to specific traditional terms when considering the relevance of this study, and there is no scientific meaning in my interpretation of the word methods. In narrative inquiry, the methodological process is accepted as a complex relational one. This requires certain amounts of flexibility (Josselson, 2013) in terms of its design. After considering the historical journey of qualitative research through moments of change and action (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; 2011), this study will continue using common research terms to describe the

processes. This is because of the need to balance creating new terms of reference in qualitative research, and an awareness of accessibility to researchers (see issues of legitimatisation, Richardson, 2000; Etherington, 2004), who may not be familiar with such technical qualitative wording. This corresponds with the ethos of this study, one of simplicity and clarity for practical use, which does not deter from the depth and breadth of academic knowledge.

## Legitimisation

*“For six months I have observed the services you provide to the people along our route. In one village you tell the hungry that they must work harder in their fields. In another village you tell the hungry to give up their preoccupation with food. In yet another village you tell the people to pray for a richer harvest. In each village the problem is the same, but always your message is different. I can find no pattern of Truth in your teachings.”*

*The Mullah looked piercingly at the young man. “Truth? When you came here you did not tell me you wanted to learn Truth. Truth is like the Buddha. When met on the road it should be killed. If there were only one Truth to be applied to all villages, there would be no need of Mullahs to travel from village to village.” “When you first came to me you said you wanted to ‘learn how to interpret’ what you see as you travel through the world. Your confusion is simple. To interpret and to state Truths are two quite different things.”*

*Having finished his story Halcolm smiled at the attentive youths. “Go, my children. Seek what you will, do what you must.”*

Halcom’s *Evaluation Parables* (Patton, 2015, p. 652)

The question of legitimising my work is an interesting concept. The *Eight Moments of Qualitative Research Model* (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; 2011) (Appendix 4) holds some ideas as to the ways in which researchers have tried to do so in the present-past. The adopting of methodologies that include participatory methods, action research, etc., I believe, may have been an attempt by some to show that there was an element of ‘Truth’ within their findings. It feels as if by including the participant/interviewee in the research design and analysis, this would enable others to legitimise their findings because there was more likely to be elements of truth within it. The term legitimisation in this study implies that the research study will

stand up to scrutiny. This simple definition is adequate to encapsulate the purpose of legitimisation. The study is situated within a social constructionist paradigm and is therefore open to the construction of methodologies by its mere epistemological approach. There is no need for a stringent set of conditions for legitimisation, because the idea that the world is socially constructed is not compatible with many of the epistemological claims of other research (Shotter, 1990). Constructed knowledge by its nature can never be 'perfect' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 331; Loh, 2013), and it is impossible to place criteria in a fixed system of reference (Smith, 1984). This is supported by the idea that strict universal criteria would be 'in danger of foisting on research artificial categories of judgment, and a framework of a priori conditions that may be impossible or inappropriate to meet ...' (Garratt and Hodkinson, 1998, p. 533). In the context of social constructionism, and this study, it is more useful to build the criteria to facilitate various forms of inquiry as we *travel along* its path. In this way the criteria fits the nature of the research that it serves (Sparkes, 2001; Smith, 1984), rather than a set of predefined rules for research practice. The research stands up to scrutiny, not just not because of the ability to replicate the study, but because of its ability to show the way in which decisions were made whilst travelling along the research journey. These decisions need to have a purpose and to be clear about why such decisions were made.

In social constructionist research and subsequent methodologies, it is important not just to consider the choices made, but the reasons for the choices, be it in the collection of data or in the analysis and reporting. For example, this study does not need to consider triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, or an audit trail (Cresswell and Miller, 2000) as it is not concerned with increasing the legitimisation of the project by reducing systemic bias (Patton, 2002). It is accepted that the narratives are constructed with the researcher, and the researcher is, therefore, part of the construction, and this process is visible within the research. Therefore, it is the researcher who needs to show the checks they do in the way they use reflexivity in the project. Reflexivity is considered in more detail in the further section, as this also has complex and philosophical underpinnings. However, the purpose of reflexivity for this study lies in the assertion that if there is a re-presentation by the researcher, it is used to:

discover and anticipate how [the re-presentation] 'does', 'can', or 'might', function to incite and foreclose, emancipate and oppress ...when applied to different times and contexts and evaluated from different social locations.

(Aguinaldo, 2004, p. 134).

When looking through a social constructionist lens, there is a need to consider what would judgements on the quality of the research achieve and what would the purpose of such judgements be (Scheurich, 1996; Aguinaldo, 2004). Scheurich, (1996) states that whenever epistemological judgement is made it is always assessed within an 'either/or' framework (trustworthy/untrustworthy, wakefulness/asleep, sincere/deceptive, compelling/boring), and this then was no different to their positivist counterparts, and serves to police the research project. Legitimation in social constructionism does not need to be regulated in that way. It does not need to be placed in a 'methodological straightjacket' and needs to be free to use what is necessary to explore the research phenomenon (Aguinaldo, 2004, p. 133). There have been numerous attempts in qualitative methodology to replicate or mimic the 'holy trinity' of positivist research, namely validity, reliability, and generalizability (Sparkes, 1998; Kvale, 1995; Tobin and Begley, 2004) as a way of legitimising a research project. One of the most decisions for this study was whether to follow a pre-defined set of conditions or to consider a personalised response to legitimisation. There are plenty of established qualitative research standards to use, the most influential being Lincoln and Guba (1985) *trustworthiness*, which considers whether credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability as the mirror to some of the positivist needs of research. Frameworks were constructed from these ideas, such as the Total Quality Framework Approach (TQF) (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015), which presents credibility, analysability, transparency, and usefulness as other possibilities. Then, there were off-shoots such as rigour (Morse, 1999), and goodness (Morrow and Smith, 2000; Mishler, 1990). There are also several specialist ideas in narrative inquiry in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four aspects, which are as complex as their generic qualitative cousin counterparts. These include utility (Riessman, 2008; Patton, 2002; Packer and Addison, 1989; Eisner, 1998), wakefulness (Clandinin and Connelly; 2004); sincerity, compellingness (Rodruigez, 2002) and verisimilitude (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). To add to the complexity, within each quality attribute, there are varying method choices related to which epistemological standpoint of the writer. Verisimilitude, for example, derives from a realist

tradition, where (in art) it denotes a faithfulness to real life (Jakobson, 1970). This can lead the researcher to resort to the use of methods such as triangulation (Begley, 1996; Creswell, 2009), peer debriefing and analysis (Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000; Wengraf, 2004), audit trails (Creswell and Miller, 2000) and member checking (Creswell, 2009; Roller and Lavrakas, 2015; Patton, 2002), as is seen in Loh's (2013) narrative study. But, there is always the question as to who sets the bar of verisimilitude and who judges what is being faithful to real life. Conversely, it can also be more ethereal in the description, where readers absorb the information given (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004) and are used to conjure a feeling that the experience is lifelike, believable, or possible (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Does the question lie in who is responsible for judging verisimilitude in general? Participants as narrators may embolden or deceive; researchers come with a set of assumptions and ideas about life, and readers also have their own life experiences to which they use to interpret and judge the research. Stories are sometimes not believable, but they happened. Each narrative will have reasons why the story is spoken, and this is what is important for this research.

Re-presentations: *"Truth? When you came here you did not tell me you wanted to learn Truth."*

There is sometimes a romantic misconception that narratives reveal a level of reality or 'Truths' by way of 'really' hearing a respondent's 'authentic' voice (Gubrium and Holstein, 2012, p. 32). They are seen as 'reports or representations (literally, re-presentations) of reality' (Silverman, 1997, p. 126). In re-presentations, there are always processes by which there is a re-production, expansion, or even a replication of an earlier presentation by another person (Nöth, 2003). This could be by the narrator, the researcher, or the reader. This cannot be avoided in research and happen at different stages (Reissman, 1993).. It conjures up the *actions* of the researcher rather than the *intent* of the reported story. It allows others, away from academic and narrative study to view such research as something that may resonate with their interests. The use of the hyphenated term *re-presentation* for this study was a conscious decision where '*real*' life is indelibly socially constructed, and an

objective and universal grand narrative reality is strongly contested. Using a hyphen denotes a move away from the word *representation*, which can denote that knowledge held within a study is an accurate representation of pre-existing reality that is static and passive in its application (Biesta and Osberg, 2007). As Krippendorff, (2012) argues, it is very difficult to verify a representation, especially when studying experience. Words, texts, and speech acts derive their meaning from what purpose is behind them. The term can, therefore, be considered as misleading because it can be confused with it showing the 'Truth.' There will never be access to the direct experiences of others, and it is impossible to be completely objective and to re-present the world without interpreting it (Peller, 1987). However, these re-presentations need to be in line with the theoretical underpinnings of this study. By using a hyphenized version of re-presentation within the methodological process, this study can flag up stages where the misconception of a pre-existing reality could detrimentally turn the study into another philosophical position and therefore fall to scrutiny. By including a hyphen, re-presentation can highlight a point in the research process whereby experiences are not a mirror of reality, but a re-presentation of what has been said, transcribed, reported, and read. The next diagram (Figure 6) shows where the most obvious re-presentations are situated within this research process and where there is a need to be mindful of the ways in which the research could stray into 'Truths.' This section is mostly concerned with methodological issues. However, there could also be an initial point in the literature review where the grand narratives are used as re-presentations of the 'Truth.' Note that the reading and the use of the data at the end of the study may not be under the researchers' control. Patton's (2015) parable may have us believe that there are the points within the journey where we need to draw swords ready to kill such re-presentations of 'Truths.' Being mindful of them and acting on presuppositions is a considerably less brutal image.

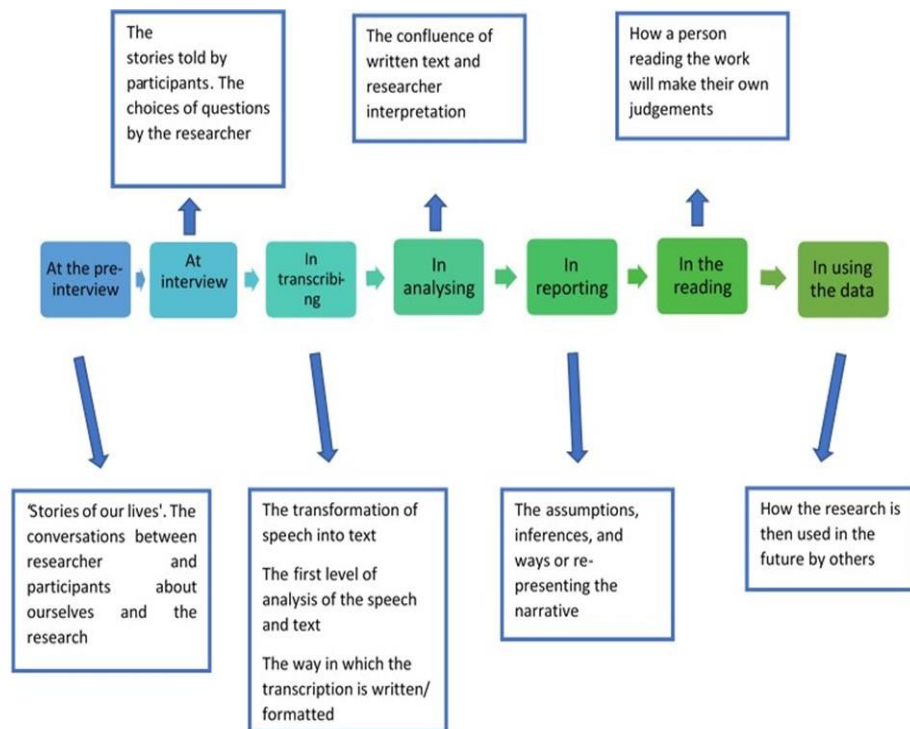


Figure 6: Re-presentations in the research process

It is important to provide a few assumptions that guide practice when re-presenting the stories of the fathers in this study. Positivists, concerned with bias, would methodologically erase such issues, to show objectivity and detachment for ‘true’ interpretation and re-presentation of data. Therefore, there is a need to attend to the ‘relational in-between spaces’ (Caine, *et al.*, 2013, p. 580) that are obvious within narrative research, which are apparent at each point of the re-presentational processes above. For this socio-constructionist study, these spaces are celebrated and offer an epistemological opening that enables readers to see methodological choices of the study (Figure 7). These spaces lie between the narrator and the researcher, the narrator, and others in their story, and the others in the story and the researcher. Note too, that there could be further relational spaces between the text and any further reader. Readers will interpret the words of a study in a way that reflects their own frames of understanding, which may be radically different to the intended re-presentation (Esin, *et al.*, 2014; Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, I have not sought to make decisions to mediate the space between any main readers of this research.



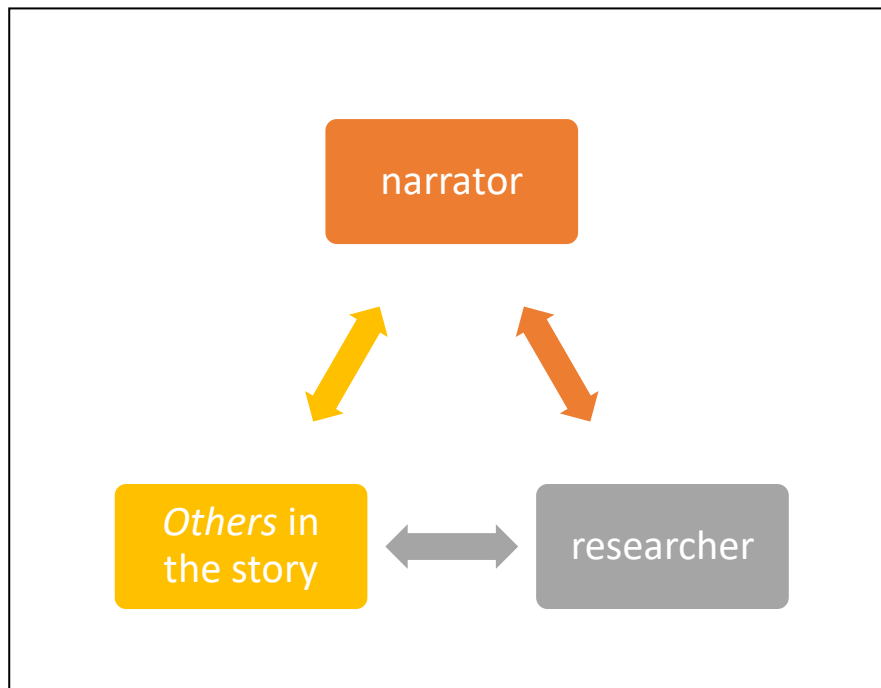


Figure 7: The relational in-between spaces

### The researcher and narrator - voice

One of the most important activities in narrative research is to characterise how the researcher expresses the voice of the narrator and that of themselves. Narrative inquiry has had a history of using historically marginalised groups to challenge the grand narrative ‘certainties’ (Etherington, 2009). This synthesises well with (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) future ideas of qualitative research to re-present and create discourse around silent voices. However, in relation to this study, the interpretation and re-presentation of white men who live in areas of disadvantage will have a great deal to do with our own idea, knowledge, and sociocultural history, which are important to discuss within the whole methodological process. My own life experiences will have an effect on re-presentation. It is common in academic discourse to find tensions around representing such a group of people. Whether the men as a group are seen as ‘victimised’, ‘damaged,’ ‘resilient,’ or ‘strong’ (Fine, *et al.*, 2003, p. 197), these perceptions are relative to experiences with such groups in the past. In previous workplaces, for example, the neoliberal rhetoric of ‘aspiration’ (Brown, 2013) was to

see fathers as being able to succeed in anything they wish. In my private life of living in a mining village pre and post the miner's strike of South Wales 1984-85 (see Price and Butts-Thompson, 2014; Milne, 2014), my experiences of the effects of aspiration rhetoric on communities of disadvantage proved a negative experience. With redundancy money from the coal mines, men invested money into their own education and family small businesses with little success. No amount of aspiration, unless they were willing to move to different areas with work away from their families, would allow for aspiration because the communities and societies around them could not sustain aspirations that required monetary investment. I distinctly remember baby clothes shops, furniture shops, and cafes opening only to be closed a few years later because the communities could not afford to pay for anything other than essentials. My close and familial relationships with men would also mediate the way in which I heard and interpreted the fathers' stories in my study. I construct meaning in the re-presentation of fathers' narratives. Being emotionally affected by these stories is a natural response to the nature of narrative and underlines the need to reject an attitude of objectivity and scientific method in this research (Gemignani, 2011). Emotionality will be discussed further in this chapter. Some parts of the men's story affected me personally and brought quite varying responses from the initial dislike of participants to anger, frustration, happiness, and joy. These responses offered an important source of data, in line with the methodological journey, and considered further in my reflexive accounts. The way in which reflexivity was part of the study is discussed further in this chapter. It helps with not only showing where my voice is situated in research but in what way I may have chosen an interpretation. It also allows me to check in with how the narrator and narrative mediates an emotional response from the researcher (Mitchell, 2000). In turn, this mediates the way in which the narrative is interpreted and re-presented. However, this is not a case in which emotional responses should be checked and quashed but should be acknowledged as part of the relational process between the researcher and narrator.

## Narrator and story

Narrative inquiry 'wreak[s] havoc with certainty. Emotions, value, felt experience with the world, memory, and the narrative explanations do not stand still...' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004, p. 37). Within the epistemological and ontological framework of this study, the participants stories do not reveal 'Truths' that show 'what exactly happened', nor are they a stable entity. In narratives, there is always a possibility of deceit or emboldenment, and stories are performed differently in different contexts (Andrews, Squire, and Tamaboukou, 2013). For example, the fisherman who re-tells his story about his best day at sea will undoubtedly make the fish bigger with his non-fishing friends, compared to re-telling the story to a fisherman expert. His story to his partner may highlight how cold it was, how the moon set on the water, and what was wrong with his fellow fisherman's relationships, deep in the knowledge that his partner has no interest in fish.

## Emboldenment

I chose this term as part of the study to deviate from the judgement of correct/incorrect, right/wrong in terms of "what really happened in reality" discourse. Emboldenment is a word that does not claim to be a mistruth or a deceit, but can act as a word that conjures up a strength and power within the narrative. In the example, the fish was imagined to be bigger by the fisherman to prove to others of his skill. The aims of this research are not to catch people out or examine what could be mistakes in peoples' stories. This does not mean that narratives are not based on facts. Even 'wrong' statements can be psychologically 'true' to the person (Portelli, 2006, p. 37). What people believe is 'fact' is as important in historical senses as actual data. For example, in fathers' stories, it may be that the story is told in a way that allows the father to be seen as the best father in the world, or how difficult their ex-partners are in terms of contact with their children. The 'Truth' of the situation is elusive and not as important to this study as the reasons why there may be an emboldenment. Socio-cultural ideals of a father, family pressures, guilt, or shame may enable such a story to be told. These accounts or cover stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) keep the fathers safe from harm (Caine, *et al.*, 2013) and allows them to live out lives according to their 'Truth.'

This is not necessarily deception, but how a person, arguably, naturally, will protect themselves from strong feelings, such as shame. The cost of decisions made by themselves or in a societal construction impacts on the story told and thus their own social constructions of their biographies. Portelli (2006) examines a similar issue in his study:

When an old rank-and-file leader, also in Terni, dreams up a story about how he almost got the Communist Party to reverse its strategy after World War II, we do not revise our reconstructions of political debates within the Left, but learn the extent of the actual cost of certain decisions to those rank-and-file activists who had to bury into their subconscious their needs and desires for revolution.

(Portelli, 2006, p. 37).

The narrators' own needs and desires to show what they really wanted to happen is also part of the story and can enable researchers to pose the questions of emboldenment. If this were to be the case in this study, there would be no need to revise the ongoing ideas around fathers and parenting, but there would be a need to recognise that the fathers talk in this way and wonder why. This is called the 'vocabulary of motives' (Mills, 1940) which considers that motives and actions originate from the situations people find themselves in, rather than an internal construction. These areas of possible emboldenment are located in the relational aspects of life. Learning from others, such as parents, for example, and those institutions that mediate their worlds. These situations have their sets of the vocabulary of motives that justify their behaviours. This guides the analytical framework of this study and how it justifies reasons for possible emboldenment. Although this study situated itself in a way that challenges the need for 'Truth,' it also acknowledges that the participants have their own ontological beliefs. Challenging such emboldenment by questioning, using audit trails, and generally deconstructing the narratives for 'truth,' or more pertinently 'lies,' may challenge the participants' ontological security (Elliot, 2005) and raises the question as to what ethical right does a researcher has to do so (Bennett, 2013). It is worth remembering that narrative inquiry is primarily concerned with the way in which the participants of this study make meaning through the stories of their experiences.

## The untold

There are significant elements of people's narratives that are not told, for many reasons, including embarrassment, anger, diversion, and denial. There are some elements of life stories that are told at great length, which may signify a deep meaning for the storyteller, or it could signify them trying to divert their own painful histories somewhere less traumatic. In Portelli's (1991) work, he observed that the way in which the chronology of the story was told sometimes missed out important pieces of information. This resulted in the researcher re-arranging their personal interpretation of an entire part of a town's history. This warns a researcher not to stick to the coded ideas from their known literature searches (such as grand narratives), prior to the narrative interviews (which happened in the pilot study). This offers important data of the socially constructed worlds of the narrators, a way of understanding the nature of the world they live in and the 'intersection between the personal and the social' (Bishop, 2011, p. 405).

## Researcher and the *others* in the story

In each story, there will be re-presentations of the 'others' who do not participate in the research but are part of the narrators' narratives. Without the ability to talk to others, it is difficult to ascertain their view or story. Therefore, there is a need to be mindful as to the possible reasons narrators talk about others in a certain way. There is a question as to how to re-present the talked-about-others in the study, given that researchers have a responsibility to tell the story as told, but also to make sure the story is used for its intended purposes. (Fine *et al.*, 2003). During the pilot study, I was confronted by views on refugees, different gender and sexual choices, and quite vivid life stories of others who were in close relationships with the narrators. There were also accusations concerning how they were treated by their ex-partners, the abuse they suffered in workplaces, and the types of crimes that were committed by themselves and others.

For example, I was able to Google search three crimes that were discussed in my pilot study and was able to pinpoint the person and place very easily. This ethical issue was overcome by

using fictionalisation; omitting some details, or not going into specifics of the case (discussed in depth in the next section). However, this did not help when there were opinions of facts about others in the study. For example, there were cases where ex-partners were viewed as evil people who prevented contact with their children. There were social workers who were lambasted for their actions, or family members vilified for their lack of love towards them. Similar to emboldenment, the way in which these issues were addressed in this study was to consider them through social, economic, and cultural contexts as if to question why and how the narrator may have such a view on subjects at this point in history (Fine and Weis, 1998).

### ‘Seek what you will, do what you must’ – the starting point.

Narrative researchers have something to say about the human condition. They move between the collection of data for inquiry and the analysis and interpretation of data. This means they must justify the claims they make to the readers and lay down enough evidence and argument for readers to make their own judgements (Polkinghorne, 2007). Legitimate research is justified lies by how the researcher can show how they value the social, economic, cultural contexts (Fine and Weiss, 1988) through their analysis of the narratives, as well as showing how they situate themselves within the study through reflexivity. In a final thought is worth reflection on future ideology of qualitative research. As suggested in the *Eight Moments of Qualitative Research Model* (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000, p. 1048) this is ‘defined by breaks from the past, a focus on previously silent voices, and a concern with moral discourse’. If there is a break from the past and a necessary explosion in the way researchers’ research, then there needs to be a break in the past with the unnecessary proliferation of terms and words that lead to unnecessary complexity. A researcher who is aware of the philosophical underpinnings such as those in this study, could argue they can use whatever methodological choice they feel serves their study, with the caveat that it is simple and coherent to use. Its simplicity is not only for academic researchers but for the silent voices it serves. If qualitative researchers are to concern ourselves with moral discourse, then it can be argued that this should permeate our own practices.

The direction by which legitimisation and re-presentation are used needs to be addressed in this study. If, as qualitative researchers, we have downed our swords against the positivist battles of the past, then there is an argument that we can feel comfortable with our craft, with the knowledge of philosophical underpinnings, and the ability to discuss such research. This does not mean that there is a reductionist approach to the work of yesteryear or a lack of rigour in our work (the term is not used in a scientific way). Each methodology and philosophy have a rightful place. However, the battle for legitimate research should not be won by recreating the holy trinity of positivist research to appease other academics and researchers. Legitimate narrative research, it can be argued, is directed towards the people it re-presents, rather than the 'Truth'. As Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) state, narrative inquiry is concerned with the experiences of the storyteller, whereby reality is what is real to them alone. They do not occupy the space in the world outside of themselves but show a re-presentation of it. There is no quest to seek 'Truth' from emboldenment and sees the narrator as embedded in a socio- cultural, and arguably relational reference system. One format I have found in an extensive literature search that simply describes the process of legitimising narrative research and sets out the boundaries for practice is by Etherington (2009). Borrowed from ethnography, the list also uses many of the ideas of Laurel Richardson (Richardson, 2000, p. 254) who believes that we need 'deliberately transgressive ways' (Etherington, 2004, p. 148) to counteract the need to use the same methods as positivist/postpositivist research to explain legitimate research (such as triangulation). The list of questions is used within this study to guide my practice as a researcher and enable me to make checks on my own actions within this research project. Although simple in layout, it proves invaluable as a checklist in terms of legitimising the study (Figure 8).

- **Does the work make a substantive contribution to my understanding of social life?**
  - Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded social science perspective and demonstrate how it is used to inform the text?
- **Does the work have aesthetic merit?**
  - Does the writer use analysis to open up the text and invite interpretive responses?
  - Is it artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and interesting?
- **Is the work reflexive enough to make the author sufficiently visible for me to make judgements about the point of view?**
  - Does the author provide evidence of knowledge of postmodern epistemologies that convinces me of their understanding of what is involved in telling people's lives?
  - Am I informed how the author came to write the work and how the information was gathered?
  - Have the complexities of ethical issues been understood and addressed?
  - Does the author show themselves to be accountable to the standards for knowing and telling participants' stories?
- **What is the impact of this work on me [the reader]?**
  - Does it affect me emotionally, intellectually, generate new questions, and move me to write or respond in any other way?

*Figure 8: A Checklist for legitimisation (Etherington, 2009, slide: 55)*



There was a final point made by Etherington (2004), that I have omitted, which considers the process of a communal sense of 'reality.' However, in this study, I did not consider this point due to my epistemological leanings. As discussed, narratives may be way out of the normalised life viewpoint of day to day living of a reader, and the narrative could offer a different perspective to the communal. In fact, one of the purposes of the study is to shift the process of a communal sense of reality. The sectors of work or TV programmes and news reports of fathers living in such areas are on the surface, led by the grand narratives of such people. Therefore, caution needs to be applied to a communal sense of reality.

## Reflexivity

In this study, reflexivity denotes interrogation of interpretation through reflection by the researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009), with regard to 'relational (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer, 2007, p. 4; Dépelteau, 2008). This also encompasses the exploration of the participant-researcher relationship (D'Silva, *et al.*, 2016). These choices require a researcher to critically self-analyse (Finlay, 2012) the reasons behind thoughts and actions. The former describes how reflection is used to make choices about the research process as well as the interpretation of data (Mruck and Breuer, 2003; Ortlip, 2008). The latter reflects on the intersubjectivity – the relational aspect, of what happens during the interview process and how this might affect interpretation in research, and how reflection is used to make choices about the research process as well as the interpretation of data (Mruck and Breuer, 2003; Ortlip, 2008). These descriptions of reflexivity have close similarities to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) vision of narrative inquiry, where consideration of the three-dimensional space; personal and subjective thoughts and observations, social interaction, and situation and place are relevant (see Figure 9).

There is some debate as to the difference between reflexivity and reflection and whether it can be used interchangeably (Pease and Fook, 1999; Parton and O'Byrne, 2000). This study sees reflection as a process of thinking in and on action (Schön, 1987) without making any movement on decisions of change and action. It also is an arrow pointed directly to the self

(Goldstein, 2017), rather than outwards and within the spaces indicated below in Figure 9. Reflexivity relates to these spaces, and researchers' ability to choose action through agency (Malthouse, *et al.*, 2014; Rennie, 2009). This could be in changing an approach to a participant because of a reflected upon prejudgement, or a specific, intentional action of interpretation and analysis. Although reflection is an ongoing process, reflexivity can be seen as a higher-level approach, which takes on board the complex relationships between micro and macro levels of social systems and how the researcher positions themselves within the research process. (Malthouse, *et al.*, 2014). Figure 9b is directly taken from Malthouse *et al.*'s (2014) (p. 601) and it is worth noting that the 'Reflectors' part of the diagram does not have its own wall or plane like the others, but the arrows point towards reflectors as if it does. Malthouse *et al.*'s (2014) does not offer a reason for this and therefore I have not taken meaning from this omission for this study.

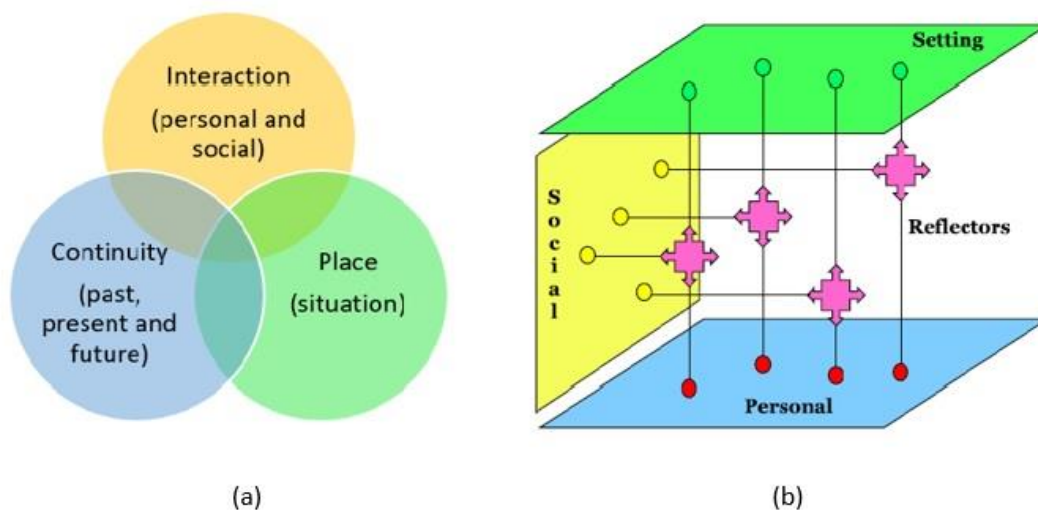


Figure 9: Similarities: Clandinin and Connelly (2000) re-presentation of three-dimensional space of narrative (a) and Malthouse *et al.* (2014, p.601) Individual reflectors within three contexts of reflexivity (b).

Using my own personal reflections within the research process helps with understanding where and how I came to a conclusion in interpretation or behaviour. However, there are criticisms of its use in research due to its researcher-centric standpoint (Riach, 2009; Kobayashi, 2003), showing self-indulgence (Letherby, 2000; DeVault, 1996; Sparkes, 2002), and navel-gazing (Finlay, 2002). As Finley (2002) suggests, the reflexive self of the researcher should only be called upon when it is purposeful to do so. Also, there is caution in using reflexive journals as objective truth documents, which sits outside the philosophical underpinnings of this project. Reflexivity in this study is seen as not a stable and objective analysis of the 'Truth' but is 'temporally situated, often written a long time after completion' (Bishop and Shephard, 2011, p. 1285).

### Ethical implications of reflexivity

Being reflexive and allowing these reflections to be held up for public scrutiny is a way of enabling ethical and rigorous research (Bishop and Shephard, 2011; Kvale, 1996). It shows that the research can be held up to moral scrutiny (Kvale, 1996), an awareness of personal biases (Rose, 1985) and personal assumptions, (Hertz, 1997). It is a method by which honesty and trust in ethics come to the forefront of practice. 'The act of reflexivity asks the reader to accept...a conscious effort to 'tell the truth' about the making of the account' (Gergen and Gergen, 2003, p. 1028). Consequently, this leads to an epistemological problem for this research project as 'Truth' can never be established. Bishop and Shephard, (2011 p.1285) urge researchers to be accepting of the fact that even though we 'might reflect deeply, analyse from multiple perspectives, and seek... to unravel and explain factors at play, we cannot'. There is no way of being certain of which parts of a researcher's past experiences, positioning, the setting of relational communication with participants will shape the interpretations or re-presentations. As Angen (2000) points out:

We cannot step outside of our intersubjective involvement with the lifeworld and into some mythical, all-knowing, and neutral standpoint. . . . By our very being in the world, we are already morally implicated. Our values and beliefs will show themselves in our actions whether we stop and think about them or not. (Angen, 2000, p. 383)

Therefore, it is important that this is explicit within this research project. I can surmise that I may have reflexive bias within the interpretation or behaviour towards a participant; however, sometimes, this will be unseen, unnoticed, and unconscious.

### Reflexivity - thinking narratively and thinking according to grand narratives

For this study, reflexivity is a way of working between the boundaries of thinking narratively and thinking according to grand narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It denotes a written re-presentation of a researcher's thoughts, feelings, and actions that interrogates their own contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). This, in turn, mediates all the interactions within the research, as well as in the texts and transcripts (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). These mediations would also flag my reflexive biases (Rose, 1984), and allow me to navigate interpretations more effectively. Working between the boundaries of thinking narratively and thinking according to grand narratives helps with this impasse. As discussed previously, thinking narratively means thinking between the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and enables researchers to be part of the participant's experience as well as attending to their own. It permits and requires an active examination of 'an experience of the experience' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 189).

Thinking narratively, therefore, is to think reflexively. There is no other outcome to thinking narratively than to gain a deeper understanding of experience (Clandinin, *et al.*, 2015). This allows for an expansion of thinking in relation to both participant and researcher experience, which is an inside, outside, back, and forth practice (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Being

awake to life experiences and how this mediates our own knowledge of others is the foundation of reflexivity in narrative inquiry. Wakefulness, it is suggested, 'is not something we can live in the abstract; it is a way of living that is grounded in experience' (Clandinin, *et al.*, 2016, p. 207).

Reflexivity, according to grand narrative, collides into a more reductionist boundary. There are more reflections related to simplistic, composite, and reduced parts of the whole narrative (Clandinin, *et al.*, 2002). This means that working around the boundaries of grand narratives allows for an increased reflection on the generalisations from predominantly empirical sources related to fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. There is also a cautionary note with regard to reflexivity that is solely related to the boundaries of grand narratives. This is where reflexivity can also be used to impose restrictions on research and make any interpretations acceptable within norms of prevailing thoughts on a subject (Merrill and West, 2009). For example, where the reflections of a researcher are used to 'fit' a grand narrative or to justify a prescribed methodology. In research writing, this can happen without a readers' knowledge, hidden away in the justifications, which leads to a corrupted research study.

### Positionality

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.

(Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 123)

Being as honest as possible and being reflexive in the role of meaning-making is integral to being an ethical researcher (Sikes, 2004). Positionality is described within this study as part of the reflexivity process that enables a readiness to ponder on one's own background, personal experiences, values, and how this mediates the interactions, observations, and analysis (D'Silva *et al.* 2016). It is negotiated through every interaction with the participant and can

cover 'aspects of identity in terms of race, class, gender, caste, sexuality and other attributes that are markers of *relational* positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities' (Chacko, 2004, p. 52).

Examining my position during each interaction helps make sense of how I interpret the father's narrative (Galam, 2015), and allows for readers to understand why I may have arrived at a conclusion. However, this examination is limited in its application. I was aware that I was part of the communities that I researched. Without going into details that would possibly jeopardize some form of anonymity, I am personally aware of the cultural aspect of such communities and my place within it. I am a Welsh female, from such deprived areas, and had lived and worked in such areas for most of my life. As a worker and an academic studying the field, I am conscious of certain aspects of identity that corresponded to the grand narratives of fathers and the areas. This leaves me with the personal lived experience of such areas as well as the understanding of how others perceive such people and areas in policy and academia. I was an 'insider' as well as an 'outsider' (Merton, 1972, see also Olive, 2014) in this study. Although I may have been able to make some inferences to my own life living in such areas, I had to position myself as someone who was unaware of a subculture, which was also part of my own (Asselin, 2003). I was not a man, and I was not a father who was having support. I had not had a relationship with a man whilst bringing up my own child; therefore had very little personal experience of male relationships. I had not been a part of the experiences of being a father. I was estranged for the most part from my own father. I had not lived the lives of the men or experienced the world in the same way. It would be presumptuous of me to think that I was an 'insider' in this sense. This insider/outsider positioning is not seen as static, but fluid in its application. This respects the shifting relationships during an interview and beyond (Trahar, 2011; Naples, 1996).

Although common 'insider' status of location and culture may have given me the chance to gain access or common ground, I was acutely aware that through self-disclosure, reciprocity and creating a relationship before the interview that I could possibly hamper the research. It aligned with Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) observations in which participants may make assumptions that I may be perceived as knowing about their experiences and therefore fail to tell me in full during the interview stage. Also, a strong similarity or relational warmth to, or

with, a father due to shared experience may also de-emphasise a conflicting view or vice versa. In the analysis, my perceptions of participants could be clouded by my own life experiences, which would steer the research towards my own positionality. I could likewise have 'loyalty tugs' in terms of reporting the respondents in a more positive way rather than inflicting negative conclusions towards aspects of their own culture (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 70). These would form the basis of checking my reflexive biases (Rose, 1985), that I would consider during the data collection and analysis.

### Lessons: Checking back to my own life story

Being objective or trying to use reflexivity to erase a researcher out of the research experience conflicts with the philosophical stance of this study. However, as discussed, being wakeful about experiences in the field of research helps a reader understand how a researcher has arrived at a certain point. An interesting example is how, during the interview, I projected my own life history on to a father who reminded me of someone from my past. Another participant looked and had mannerisms very much of someone I wished to forget. I wrote in my journal about how my strong emotions to such a difficulty were regulated during the first 20 minutes of the interview. I described this, and this allowed me to mediate my responses and subsequent analysis of his story, aware of my own triggers in interviewing. This highlights the co-construction of the interviews and the importance of feelings, and control dynamics which at times, levels the playing field in interviews where 'as a researcher, I am no more, no different from the subjects of my research' (Walkerdine, 1997, p. 73). This would be something that I would battle with throughout the research. This is, I suspect, normal in researching a subject that deals so closely with peoples' experiences. For example, I could empathise strongly with the issues of drug misuse and deaths, and in my own experiences of living in the valleys of South Wales in the late 1990s. I was drawn to some participants and not to others. Sometimes I felt very strong emotions. The reasons usually lay in the ability to understand and empathise with them. What is worth noting is that in the analytical framework, I have also ensured there is a section which notes the un-emotional, the flyaway comments that did not affect me. This is something also worth noting as these

may have been missed due to my lack of connection to the participant or a sense of normalcy in their telling of the story, which may not be as normal to others reading it.

## Emotionality

There were a few occasions during the pilot interviews, when I recognised my body reacting to the stories told. There was a stab in the stomach at hearing about incessant bullying in the workplace. On hearing the story of birthing a stillborn baby, there was an utter overwhelming wave of prickles that came from my toes up into my head whilst willing my tears not to push out of my eyes. There was an indignant rage creeping over my head, hammering my heart when hearing about how a mother was laughed at during horrific labour and a dull, porcelain cold horror hearing about childhood sexual abuse. There were also moments of catching the wickedly infectious laugh of a respondent who remembered with humour the funny and shocking antics of her mother before she died and being on the same wavelength of sharp and light humour of a recovering alcoholic. Researchers are human. They are not detached, automatic, or objective (Oakley, 1981) and are part of the co-construction of the narrative (Reissman, 1993). Reflexivity is concerned with the researchers' own reactions to the study (Holloway and Biley, 2011). Researcher emotions are reactions that are sometimes considered unreasonable, especially when held up to an objective scientific epistemological approach (Holtan, *et al.*, 2014). However, for this study they play an important role of flagging up the 'blind spots' in the research process.

Emotionality is the observable reaction to emotion, and for this study, concerns not only the participants' own emotionality but also the researchers' responses to the interview process. The emotions felt in this research during the interview are classed as relational. They are not felt inside of the head or body and personal to the person experiencing them but are created in co-action, the outcomes of a relationship (Gergen, 2009), either through interviewing or from past and present personal experiences. Emotionality is part of the researcher's own values and historical contexts. Acknowledging that emotionality happens in the interview



process allows a reflexive and transparent study and can aid reflexive questioning of data collection and interpretation in the study (Holtan, *et al.*, 2014).

### The space between – reflexivity and the relational

This research accentuates reflexivity and the position of researcher's context (gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) as part of narrative interpretation (Angrosino, 2005). However, being aware of the ideas of reflexivity in line with positioning can be a complex and highly disciplined activity. I was skilled in reflective practice, but in research terms, reflexivity, I felt, could quickly spiral into a micro analysis of every interaction in the research process. For example, power shifts during the interactions in the research process in relation to gender, race, class, sexuality, education, etc. between myself and the fathers can be completely conscious or unconscious (Lukes, 2005), and therefore may be highlighted by myself or completely missed. These nuances would take superhuman self-consciousness (Seale, 1999b), which I argue is unobtainable. Positionality will not take precedence over the overall act of reflexivity in this narrative research study. Recognition that the research will inevitably reflect some of the characteristics of the researcher (Gibbs, 1991) is important, and the register of writing, which includes my own personal reflections, show this position. However, attention must also be given to thinking narratively and the intersubjective relationships between the researcher and participant related to during the research without the labels above being constantly used as a reasoning for such interactions. Also, consideration of the balance of the grand narrative and thinking around these boundaries would be needed. More thinking on this section can be found in Stage 5 the Framework for Re-Presenting Narratives section of this chapter.

### The Research Process

This section considers the decision process for each stage of the methodological journey. Ethical considerations are discussed within every section, as the process requires ethical thought throughout. It is worth noting that the project adheres to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) (2018) research code of practice. Ethical approval was given on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2017. The research project is also influenced by the Economic and Social

Research Council (ESRC) (2018) and British Educational Research Association guidelines for ethical practice (BERA, 2011; 2018). A small purposeful sample of three men was chosen. All were white, heterosexual men of different age range and life experiences; Tomas, Rob, and Adam (these are pseudonyms). The men attended Dad's group sessions for fathers in an urban area in Wales. Purposeful sampling was considered to be an effective way of using limited time resources (Patton, 2002) with a group of men who would be especially knowledgeable and experienced to answer the research question (Bernard, 2002). In biographical narrative research, it is said that the sample should be between two and seven people (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2017). This is due to the nature of the research study and the depth and complexity of analysis.

### The possibility of 'vulnerable' people

I liaised with the team who facilitated the groups by emailing and speaking to the manager and team leaders. With the agreement, I then contacted family workers who mediated my meetings with fathers. One of the key issues in most social research that participants could be classed as vulnerable at the point of interview. The Economic and Social Research Council, (ESRC) (2018) states that vulnerability can be the result of abusive relationships, age, marginalisation, disability, and disadvantage in power relationships. In addition, there can be a temporal vulnerability (Tolich, 2004), where a person can be vulnerable at the time of research, for example, a loss of employment, a relationship breakdown, a court case for custody. People can also feel pressured into taking part, and this is especially the case when the fathers may have complex relationships with the family workers who will mediate my introduction. This is not to say that fathers within the study lack the capacity to make informed decisions; however, it is an important ethical consideration. As a researcher, it is worth noting that, depending on the research, *any* person participating in research could potentially be classed as vulnerable (or equally empowered), and it is the duty of the researcher to mitigate the risks associated with it. It is, therefore, important to consider that specific care is given to each action in relation to ensuring that the fathers have all the necessary information to participate in the study and that their decisions are their own. This

is depicted in the flow chart below, which shows the process by which the fathers took part in the study and how risks were mitigated, and will be utilised as a way of explaining my decision development at each stage of the interview process. It is worth noting that each stage had its own methodological considerations, plus in some sections there are ‘Lessons’ that mediate the research process and change the decisions on methodological process.

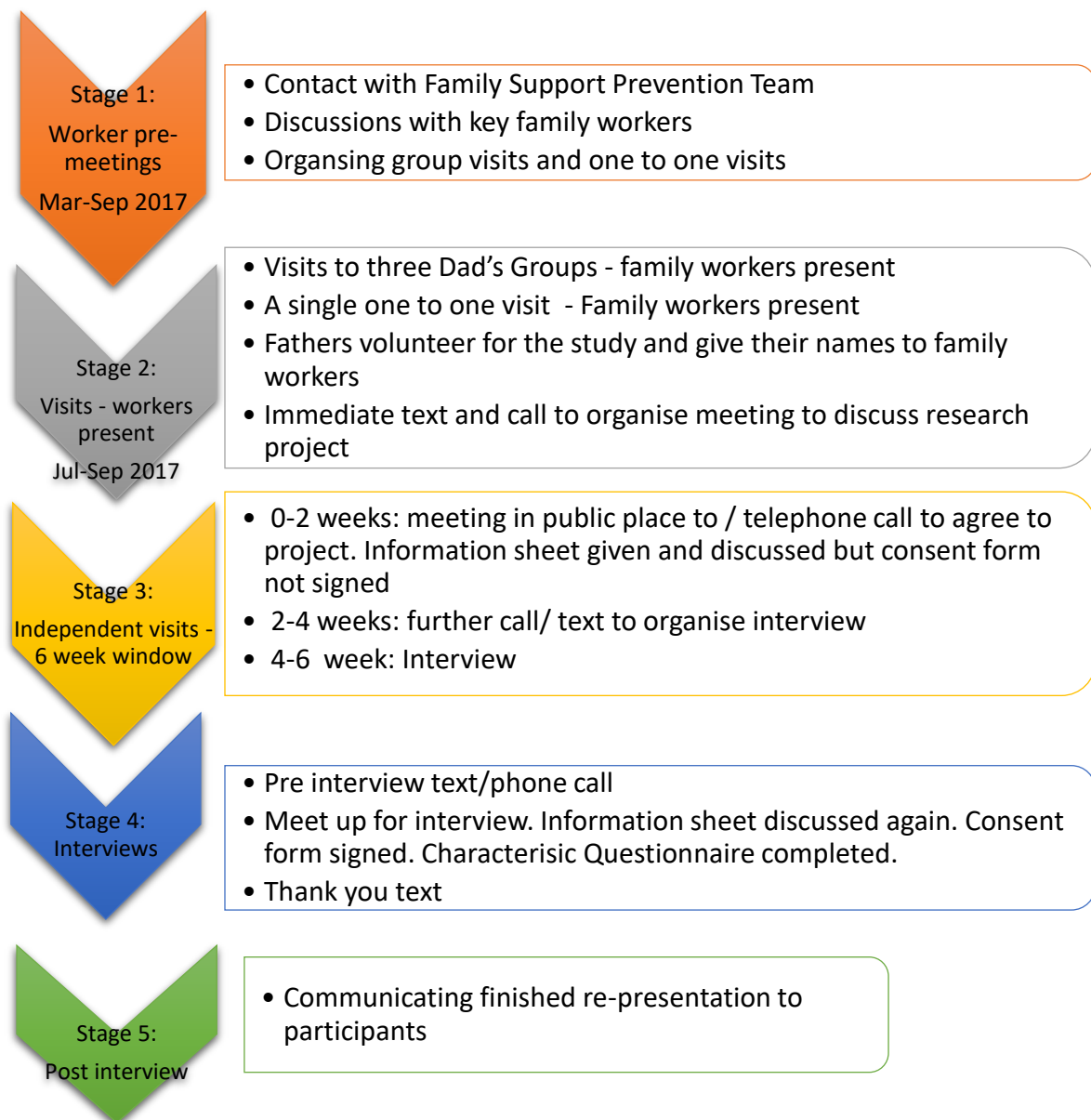


Figure 10: Fathers' communication flow chart for interview

## Stage 1: Worker pre-meetings March-September 2017

Initial pre-meetings were held with the manager of the service to discuss the aims of the research. The pilot study had also been conducted with the same team, and I informed the manager of the changes to the study. The main issue for the team was my response to disclosures related to harm to themselves and others, especially children, and of confidentiality and anonymity. I had previously worked as a family worker and knew the obligations of the team for harm disclosures. They are in line with the ethical guidelines for research, whereby disclosure is necessary if there is perceived harm to participants and others (BERA, 2011; 2018; UWTSD, 2018). Due to the nature of the family workers' role, each father would have knowledge of such a need for disclosure in their working relationship with their family worker. This was also the case for me, as I was bound to inform the relevant people as per protocol if there was any need to do so. This would mean that the information would be shared back to the team and with my supervisors as per the UWTSD (2011; 2018) protocol.

### Internal confidentiality

In discussions with the team manager, it was suggested that the study would name an area in Wales as well as the name of the parenting team. This was due to the ongoing positive relationships within the team of general collaboration with academic research that already existed and their ability to use such relationships within their own evaluative and evidence-based processes. However, there were some issues related to internal confidentiality, also known as deductive disclosure, which balances the need for a detailed account in the narrative research and protecting the identities of the participants (Kaiser, 2010; Tolich, 2004). This also addresses anonymity, and is less transparent than the general promise not to identify the participant in the final report and sometimes goes unseen in ethical guidelines (Tolich, 2004). It takes into account that anonymity and confidentiality are not only concerned with changing names and omitting place names but balances the need for thick description and analytic integrity versus the fathers' emotional and reputational needs (Qureshi, 2018). As discussed, it was sometimes easy to trace participants in the pilot study on web searches, due to their life histories. It was also felt their narrative life stories would

include sensitive issues of other people closely linked to them without the person's permission. In addition, there was also a chance of a breach of internal confidentiality because fathers may recognise each other as a result of them attending the same groups, as well as a possibility that they knew each other personally (Tollich, 2004).

No decision is fool-proof as there is always a chance that people would recognise each other and others discussed (Burgess, 1984). However, risk reductions were put in place to mitigate some of the risks associated with internal confidentiality. One consideration in mitigating risk for internal confidentiality is that the narratives and the experiences of fathers would become disjointed and 'shuffled beyond recognition' at a 'considerable analytical cost' to the research (Gabb, 2010, p. 28). Therefore, there is always a need for respecting the trust invested in me to tell a fathers' story whilst also retaining the depth and intricacy of their experiences.

#### Risk reductions for internal confidentiality

The local area names were omitted, and so was the name of the parenting team who supported the fathers. Any aspect of the study that could allude to the geographical area was changed and replaced, if possible, to respect anonymity. One man was chosen from each of the groups in different areas, therefore reducing the risk of others being able to identify them from their stories in groups. Two had been long-time attendees, and the other had only attended for a few weeks and then dropped out. His story was not shared within the group in the depth that is implied in the research. For the two who had been "long-termers", discussions in stage 3 alerted them to the fact that they may know each other from the reported stories and that this may be a risk to them (see Ellis, 1995; Whyte, 1993). The men, therefore, had been prepared for this and could limit the information in the narratives if they chose to do so respectfully. Where others were discussed within the narrative, some of the most sensitive issues were generalised in the report writing section. For example, if a person discussed their significant others' life stories, this would not be included in the study. Terms such as "had a difficult upbringing," "was unwell," or "experienced a significant trauma" would be used rather than go into detail. The context of the story remained the same, as it concentrates on the personal experiences of the fathers. By the same token, any aspect of the

fathers' story that may divulge their identity was assessed as being a risk. For example, one father in the pilot study was a prolific offender, but the crime was not detailed even though the story was in some ways related to his crimes. Although difficult to assess, this was to ensure other persons who were victims of the crimes would not be subjected to further harm if reading the research.

It is worth noting that the idea of internal confidentiality was not included in the information page given to the participants under the use of their data, as this issue did not present itself until after the university Ethics Committee acceptance of the study. I had to refer to discussing it with the fathers before signing consent. Discussions with key family workers took place to inform them about my study and ask if there were suitable fathers on their caseload. Dads groups were a useful area to target as the fathers who attended had possibly been in crisis and were being maintained and supported within the groups, and were more likely to be responsive to the research. One father also received one-to-one support from a Dad's worker as he was relatively new to the service and had made significant progress. I sent the information sheet to the workers and held telephone conversations which had been approved by the UWTSD Ethics Committee. The consent form (see Appendix 5) was not discussed at this stage, as I wanted to make sure that I had given the fathers the information needed. I wanted to avoid there being a chance of unconscious coercion by speaking to their family worker and them feeling they had to be part of the research.

## Stage 2. Visits with workers who were present

It was decided that although the family workers had an idea who may be useful to the study, that I should attend the Dads groups to discuss the research with all who attended the groups, including the fathers in question. There were three groups with an average of six fathers or more in each group. There were varying reasons why the fathers attended the groups, but the general aim was to support them to be the best dads they could be to their children. Two of the groups received me well and appeared to be amenable to me talking

about the study.

At this point, I went through the information sheet, and questions were asked about the study. This was done on an informal basis over around 10 minutes. I was also able to explain the concept of identity capital, which I thought may be difficult to translate into non-academic language. This was described (as in the information sheet) as the assets or resources that a person gets from the relationships around them. Some of the fathers talked about their experiences and how the group had helped them during the 10-minute conversation. I also discussed confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any point, as well as the potential for their story being used in talks, publications, and discussions. I reiterated that there was no pressure from anyone to volunteer and that there was no incentive to do so. I suggested that after I had left, they could tell their family worker if they agreed to meet me for a further discussion, and the family worker would contact me with their details. I wanted to make sure that this process would be in place, in case there was a person who was particularly vulnerable at this point in time, or that there were other risks associated with the person giving me their contact details directly. However, this was purely a risk reduction/lone working consideration rather than a screening for who may have the best story or a “nannying” of who may be less vulnerable to talk at that period.

#### Lessons: Be prepared for anything

I met one of the participants in a lively fathers’ group in a church hall. This was my final group to visit. Previous groups had warmly welcomed me, even if they had no intention of being part of the study and allowed me to speak. Explaining the project, I was aware that I had a ‘cultural fluency in my ability to communicate with the fathers (Gutmann, 2002, p.38; Galam, 2015). I was able to contextualize the project by using similar words and nuances as the fathers because I had lived and worked in similar communities. This was a natural part of building a rapport with the men and a way of them accepting me within their groups and allowing for an easier understanding of the project without using academic jargon and outsider language. I was aware that one of the fathers was not making eye contact with me and had body language that made me think that he was not interested. One of the other men

was more open to me discussing the project, and I was conscious of directing my talk towards him and others. I was very aware that I should try and avoid sell the research to men who looked closed off and not bothered. He sat there, to my left, leaning back on his chair, baseball cap low, possibly to avoid eye contact and arms folded. He was my size, about six-foot tall. He was a dominant presence within the room rather than someone who blended into the background. He tapped his foot occasionally as I spoke to them about the study. I had not expected the response from him, but I felt something was about to be said. Rob spoke:

“What’s the point of this then?” Silence. The family workers moved in their seats.

“What’s the point of what?” I asked respectfully.

“What’s the point of doing this when the government don’t care about us, anyway? They never listen. Nothing ever changes”.

“What doesn’t change?”

“The way in which we are treated by the government. They don’t give a shit about us here, they only care about people making money and capitalism”.

I was taken aback. I had not planned to discuss capitalism at ten o’clock on a Friday morning. Shamefully, this was not a conversation I had considered discussing with fathers in a parenting group. I attempted an answer that as a researcher, I believed that my work would make a difference and that to my knowledge, there was not a study that had collected the stories of men in the area. I explained that it might not directly affect government policy that could possibly affect the way people work with fathers in the community. A classic line used, I imagine, by most researchers defending their work. The group got into a discussion about how things never changed. One of the family workers (there were two present) drew a diagram of the “top-down, bottom-up” societal structure on the board, possibly trying to help me in the questioning and to diffuse the awkward situation.

Him: “But it won’t, though, will it?”

Heck. This was turning into the best preparation for my viva voce. I explained that if it were not for research, then there would not be an understanding of how people lived and reacted



to their worlds. I discussed the issue of research a lot of the time, relying on statistics, especially in areas that are seen as deprived, and that I wanted to make a difference by looking at the stories of men rather than a Likert scale type response to evaluations of services. I wanted to add to the statistics by using peoples' stories and for there to be some type of evidence from the people who live in areas like theirs and had not been studied, especially with fathers. I argued that if the stories were not told, then how could people have the evidence to support change.

I doubted I would ever see him again. This had been a lesson in many ways. The reasoning for the research was important. The reasons for being part of the research process were varied and needed to be taken into consideration. For him, maybe it was about whether his story would change the structure of the society of which he was part, rather than altruistic in nature. I was unable to categorically state that it would, but I explained that it would contribute to the knowledge of fathers within a specific area. I was surprised to be contacted by the family worker who said that he would be happy to be interviewed. On reflection, sometimes, the perception of opposition could in fact be a test by a participant to judge if they can trust you with their narrative. I can reason he may have wanted to know my stance on the system of social injustices before he trusted me, or whether, under pressure, I was strong enough to hear his story.

### The capacity to agree to research

There may be a number of participants in research that would be considered vulnerable for a number of reasons. However, participants that may be considered vulnerable also have the capacity to make decisions. Capacity cannot be claimed as impaired 'simply by virtue of having an addiction, psychotic illness or learning difficulties and disabilities' (Mental Capacity Act, 2005, p. 6). As I did not know the fathers personally, the family worker was used as a go-between to collect the volunteers' contact details as a way of ensuring that the participants chosen had the capacity to make decisions. This is in line with ESRC's (2018) interpretation of the Act whereby researchers should take reasonable steps to identify a person who knows the participant well and can use a worker as a way of ensuring that there is sufficient proof

the person had this capacity, and if not that they are further supported to make their own decisions. There were no such issues with the fathers who volunteered for the study.

### Stage 3. Visits without workers present

I visited the men in community areas that they chose. Narrative research is based on trust between the researcher and the participant (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000 ). These meetings were held to ensure fathers felt they had sufficient information and time to consider their responses and agreement for an interview before interviews commenced (ESRC, 2018). It was determined that I would not visit men in their own homes in line with a lone persons' risk assessment. Some were visited in a Flying Start environment, a local community café, McDonald's, and after a further visit to Dad's group. This visit was important to reinforce matters of confidentiality and anonymity. There was no sensitive information being shared during these interviews; therefore public places were acceptable, and it did created a chance for the men to see me alone and to ask further questions.

### Reciprocity

Reciprocity is described as the need for mutual benefit in research (Rossman and Rallis, 1998). There were no incentives for being part of the research project, apart from tea and cake/biscuits (or a value burger at McDonald's). However, the men agreed to participate in research, commenting that they would like to help me and/or to help other fathers. This altruistic reason for participation in research is well documented as one reason for recruitment to research. This is coupled with self-interest in terms of talking about their lives, equating to a therapeutic act of self-help (Newington and Metcalfe, 2014; Sikweyiya and Jewkes, 2013; McCann, *et al.*, 2010; Jefferson, *et al.*, 2011). At each stage, it was reiterated that they did not have to be part of the research and that there was no pressure to participate.

Reciprocity can also suggest there is a building of relationships within the researcher participant environment, which enables researchers to consider their positioning within

research and the ethical responsibility towards the participants. During these meetings, there were conversations about who we were, where they worked, how they found the group, and my interest in fathers' groups. Fathers talked in general detail about problems with drugs and mental health, and I generally discussed my time growing up in the South Wales valleys and seeing many of my friends and acquaintances struggle with their own issues. I had made a conscious decision that I should share some of my own history in these meetings. The reciprocal offering of information is a natural consequence of meeting someone and getting to know each other. I did not go into a lot of detail, and it depended on the questions from the fathers themselves. This was in line with giving breadth of personal information, rather than depth (Greene, *et al.*, 1997); "Yes, where I lived, there was also a lot of problems with drugs" "many of my male friends had difficulty in the 90s", rather than a full narration and specificity of the situations of my past. I felt this was an important way to connect with the fathers. I was also asking them to share their most intimate life stories. By sharing some parts about myself, I acknowledged that there might be risky issues that could be discussed and that I was not (outwardly) going to be shocked by the issues that they may possibly face. By positioning myself in this way, I was trying to be accepted into the group as an 'insider' (Merton, 1972) and also consciously trying to relieve some of the ethical dilemmas related to power relationships that could happen within the interview process.

Reflecting on these interactions, I questioned whether this was the 'correct' way to behave for the research project. I was conscious of the positivist objective rhetoric in research. I was aware that this was not the practice of some biographical narrative researchers. Wengraf (2017), cautioned on the meeting of participants and self-disclosing, to veer the conversations to just a nod or a mumble, in practice, shutting down the conversation. By positioning myself as a detached, objective researcher consciously not participating in a natural flow of conversation, I would be following a more traditional and scientific model of narrative inquiry. This can be seen more often used in German or Danish biographical narrative traditions where there is an attempt to be seen as more objective, which helps establish the efficacy of the study (Merrill and West, 2009; West, *et al.*, 2007). However, positioning myself as detached in the research contrasts with the epistemological foundations of the study and in the natural approach to connecting with a participant and breaking down the barriers of more traditional scientific research (Merrill and West, 2009).

## Self-disclosure

It is suggested by some researchers that the distance between the interviewer and the participant is said to increase if there is a reluctance to share self-disclosures (Wenger, 2002). Oakley's (1981) observed that for reciprocity to happen, there needs to be a level of intimacy. Narrative inquiry is generally seen as a dialogical activity, construction of an interpersonal relationship where self-disclosure is a conscious part of the process of research (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000; Bishop and Shephard, 2011). If I were to ask the fathers to share their sometimes most intimate stories, then it could be argued it only natural that I too imparted some part narrative related to my own identity. It provides an opportunity for the fathers to know a little about my character, and whether they would feel comfortable in continuing to the interview phase of the research.

Self-disclosure is accepted in narrative research, especially when stories may include stories that may not be societally acceptable and would be difficult or embarrassing for the narrator to discuss. These include research into risky sexual behaviour (Bishop, 2011), young parenting (Bishop and Shephard, 2011), and gay relationships (Holmes, 2010). Creating a relationship where there is a chance of, at most comparing experiences, or least of acknowledging them allows for more critical self-reflection within narratives and may allow for less emboldened stories to be told that re-present the narrator in their best light (Holmes, 2010; Seymour, *et al.*, 1995). Some research shows that participants can view the researcher as someone with power and authority (Ballinger and Payne, 2000; Finlay, 2002). Self-disclosure can also be considered as an ethical issue where it is used to minimise the effects of the power relationship (Bishop and Shephard, 2011; Eder and Fingerson, 2002), hence a chance for 'levelling the field' in the research relationship. However, I needed to take into consideration that fathers may have had a negative experience with women of authority, or that I reminded them of someone in their own lives and what this may mean for the study. Likewise, we cannot know how we are to be perceived by participants, and encounters are not objective in their interpretations (Bishop and Shephard, 2011). There was also the issue of being aware of how much to disclose. An overtaking of the research relationship can tip into self-indulgent babblings and being 'all about me.' Participants may not want to know about the lives of the

researcher (Cotterill, 2002) and this was respected in the balance of the conversations pre-interview. Therefore, I took the stance of respectful reciprocity, where a level of confidence is important.

#### Stage 4: The Interviews

Interviews were conducted in places within the communities that were accessible to and comfortable for the fathers. These consisted mostly of the community centres where they attended Dad's groups, and with the agreement for one participant, a room in the local University building close to the fathers' home. Before the interview started, I reiterated the information on the participant information sheets and consent forms were signed (Appendix 5). Consent forms were signed at this stage due to my observations that the men were willing to sign them at pre-meeting before discussing the information sheet in full. Some already had signed, but I went through the consent form again to make sure they understood. I made a conscious decision to discuss the study with them before the interview took place and give them an opportunity to ask further questions. This is in line with BERA (2018) rules on informed consent. Further discussion on the method of informed consent in narrative research can be found in Stage 5, which discusses the problems with a surface level understanding of informed consent in narrative research. A demographic questionnaire based on relevant UK Census questions was used to gather the information that would be appropriate for a pen picture of each participant (Appendix 6) and to enliven the narrative further (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000).

## The change to BNIVM

Interviews were conducted following the Biographical Narrative Interpretation Method (BNIM) part of the interviews (Wengraf, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000; Schütze, 1983) which is discussed in Chapter 3. This was chosen due to a specific ethos of narrative interviewing, which values the interview being directed by the participant and the lack of pre-defined topics and themes which mediated a set of pre-defined questions of the researcher (Edwards and Holland, 2013). It also lends itself to using the same language as the participant, rather than predefined scripted responses to “tell me more...” questions by using the same wording as was used by the participant (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) which allows a natural flow to the processes defined in the pilot. More importantly, by choosing this method of interviewing, the narrator chooses what to include in their story and what to leave out. This can lead to a richer analysis of the story because there has been minimal interruption and questioning by the researcher (Horsdal, 2017).

Narrative interview methods are sometimes seen as being a simple way of collecting and analysing data (Waniek, 2014). However, this is not the case. Certain methods to underpin specific philosophical research assumptions (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2010), for example, free-association narrative interview (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), requires the researcher to remain invisible in the research as much as possible and focusses on the analysis of the unconscious, which is defended by participants’ motivations and anxieties. The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995; McAdams, 1987), has a long list of questions that encompass an arguably Westernised view of identity. BNIM is situated within critical realism (Wengraf, 2004; Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf, 2000) which endeavors to ‘mine’ for ‘nuggets’ of reality in its analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and calls for a multi-disciplinary member check approach to deliberate ‘True’ meaning. Critical realist arguments are sometimes convincing in the natural sciences, but their persuasiveness could be seen as reliant on the success of results from empirical scientific research (Kemp, 2005). There are many factors that can influence narrative life story accounts and their interpretations (Corbally and O’Neill, 2014; Fisher, 1978; Plummer, 2001; Sandelowski, 2002), including stances presented by social constructionism.

The BNIM method for *interpreting and analysing* data does not fit with the philosophical underpinnings of the study due to its positioning within critical realism. Henceforth, for this research study, the BNIM interview will be called BNIVM, to differentiate between the interview technique used in this study and the interpretation technique associated with it, which has been discarded to make way for a more relevant analytical tool situated within social constructionism. There may be some anxiety in relation to a pick and mix approach to using part of a prescribed research methodology, such as BNIVM. Yet, it is worth noting that methodological and philosophical prescriptive viewpoints do not need to be a set of:

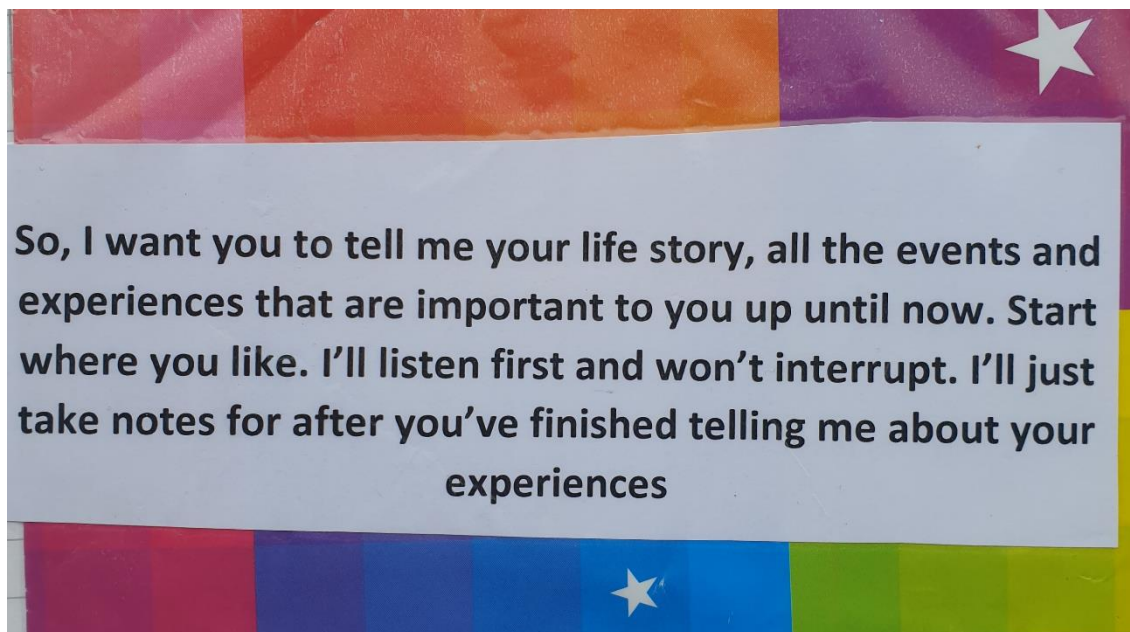
‘bodies of rules, regulations...whose purpose is to receive our unquestioning obedience and complete submission, but instead as a source of other scholar’s wisdom and insights inspiring us to innovate ways of looking at and combining different research methods.’

(Lee and Sarker, 2008, p. 3; quoted in Zachariadis, et al., 2010).

A change of a predefined approach to a known method sometimes signals a change in the status and nature of data, which mediates the underpinning philosophy (Jones, 1999). However, BNIVM, as an interview approach, does not attempt to chase a specific reality through its interview process and questioning. It follows a definitive pathway of an interview that works well with a socio-constructionist approach. With more emphasis on the pre, during, and post interactions and relationship building between participant and researcher, it facilitates the idea of an active interview that is co-constructed. This method is also useful for deviating from the generalities of their life stories is often the case in research and concentrate on specifics (see Chase, 2003b; Caraniawska, 1997; Weiss 1994).

## The BNIVM interview approach

A reminder that the BNIVM method for this study is taken from the work of BNIM, which can be found in more detail in Wengraf's (2004) work. However, it is useful to show a simplified version here based on this study, as I found Wengraf's work over complicated for the purpose of this research. A critique of my reasoning behind this statement can be found in Chapter 6, Part 2. BNIVM relies on two sub-sessions. Sub-session 1 asks a main "tell me about your life..." Single Question to Induce a Narrative (SQUIN) (Figure 11).



*Figure 11: The SQUIN question*

Sub-session 2 asks about Particular Incident Narratives (PIN), which is told within the main narrative and of interest to the researcher. At this point, the researcher takes a passive role in the data collection, listening, taking notes, and logging PINs. PINs are taken in order, and the words that were written are the ones spoken by the fathers verbatim. Wengraf (2004) suggests that the first PIN and the Last PIN are always used to ensure questions are formed in a particular way in the belief that each persons' narrative has its own Gestalt. Although the



term Gestalt generates a cognitive psychological description, for this study, it merely suggests the idea that the whole (story) is greater than the parts (Holloway and Jefferson, 2009) and that it should be discussed in order of the main sub-section. It argues there is a need to understand the structure of the narrative before there can be any insight into the components of it. This is in polarity to the epistemological argument of 'mining' for certain 'nuggets' of knowledge and sees the text before breaking down into constituents.

Wengraf (2004) also discusses the use of theoretical questions (TQs) that underpin the central research question (CRQ) of *How is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?* Simply, TQ's ask, 'what questions does that literature tell us we have to answer if we are to answer this CRQ?' (Spikard, 2017, p. 222). In a structured or semi-structured interview, TQs would form the basis of interview questions. This is comparable to the initial rudimental sets of questions that were produced in my pilot study, before the turn to BNIVM. In this study, they are used to 'scan' for PIN in the interview that relates to the CRQ of the study. They are also used to analyse the text, which can be found further along in this chapter. The TQ's themselves are not static representations of what *must* be seen in the interviews as it is important to remember that this study does not have a linear framework where the literature review is conducted before the onset of methodological actions. Rather it goes back and forth, building up knowledge and understanding as part of the journey. Therefore TQ's in this type of research is not as set in stone. There could possibly be some aspect of the interviews that throw up knowledge on other aspects of the study that could change the whole trajectory of the research. This needs to be taken into account when studying the figure below (figure 12).

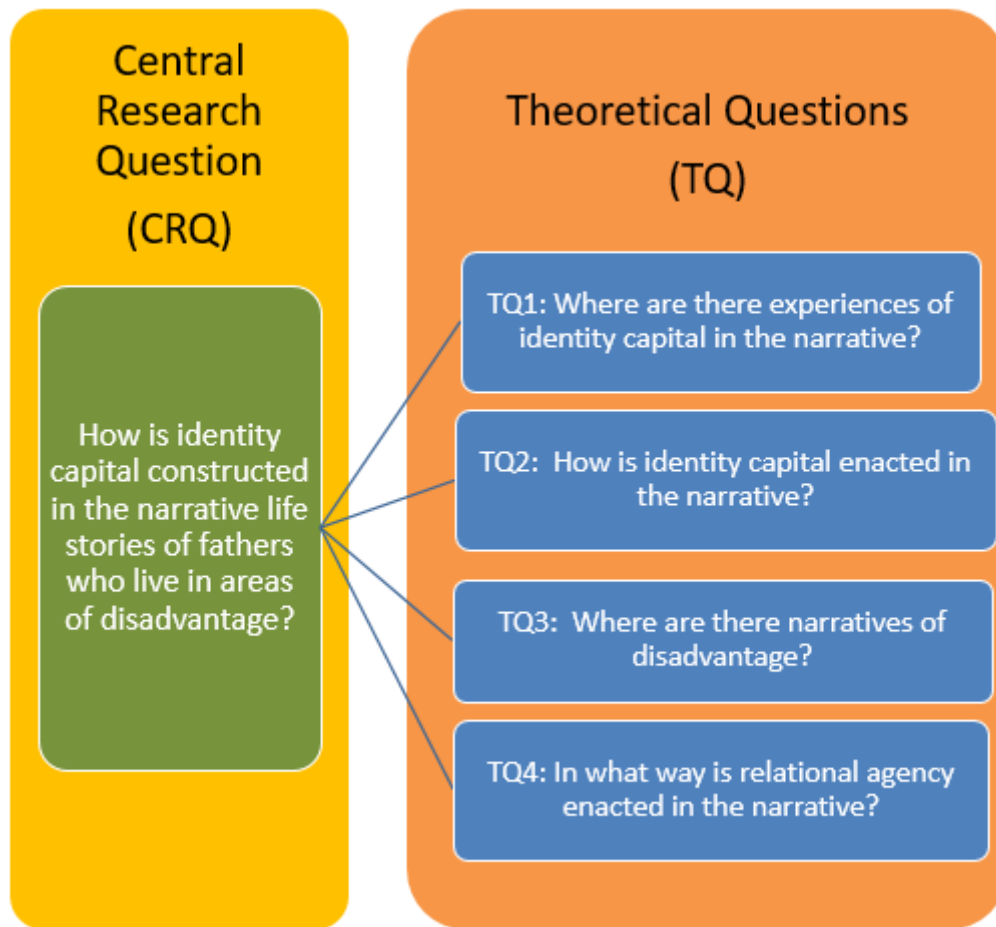


Figure 12: Theoretical Questions (TQ's)

Figure 13 (next page) shows the initial note-taking with regards to what is said by the fathers in their main narrative from asking the SQUIN question. Here is an example from Tomas' interview. I have redacted information that may be ethically compromising (figure 13).

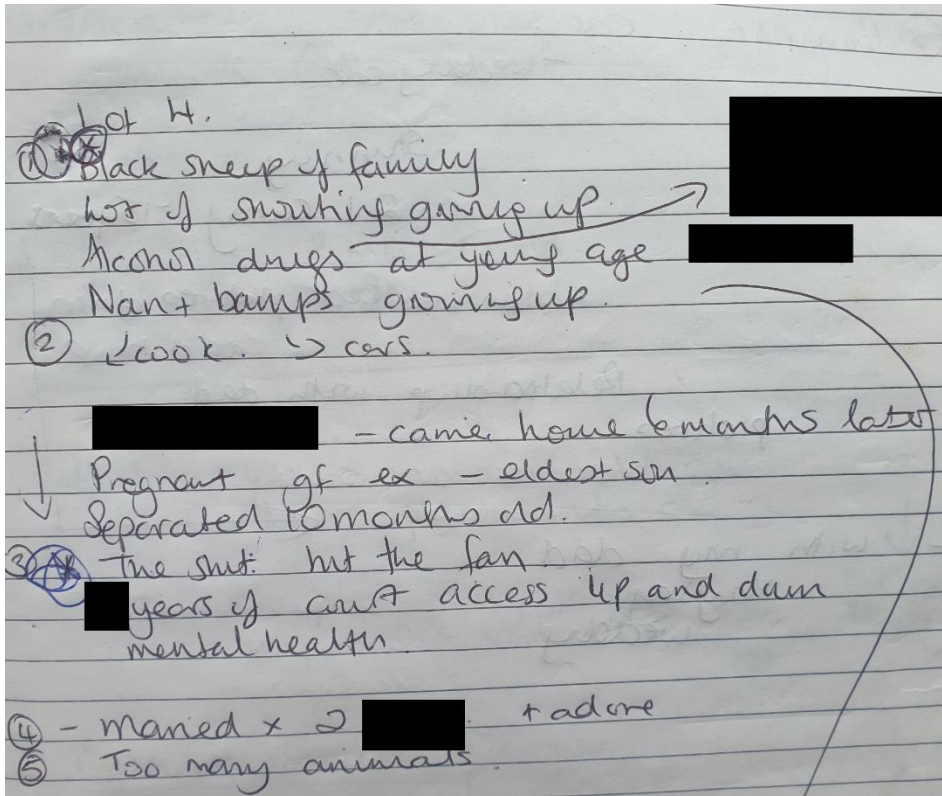


Figure 13: Notes made in Tomas' interview after sub-session 1 SQUIN question

After the initial SQUIN question and reply, I took some time to look at the study and choose which PINS may give me further information to help with my CRQ. Note here that the top and bottom PINs are always chosen, and then others are chosen, which are of interest. Also, note the rudimentary stars placed on particular things that Tomas said that were striking (“black sheep of the family” and “shit hit the fan”). The second stage of the interviews concentrates on these choices. I started with a question that would illicit further responses to each PIN chosen. This consisted of a question which recognised the PIN and elicited a further narrative based on that experience. This was based on Wengraf's (2017) training, and information on how this is constructed and noted can be found in Appendix 7. However, a simplified example would be:

*“You said that you were the black sheep of the family. Do you remember that particular time/situation/phase/period/occasion/incident/event/moment/day particularly strongly?”*

The choice of construction of the question would depend on the PIN and what was most useful to further illicit responses. The answer to the questions would be written down, and again, if needed, there would be further rounds of note-taking, choosing, starring, and asking the question with variations until a natural endpoint. A further question asking if there is anything they wish to add can be asked at the end of the natural endpoint. A third subsection may be applied if there are any further questions from the interview, however, this is not always necessary, and was only used as a way of collecting more information about specifics in the story that was not evident.

### Gender and the interview process

Gender was the most apparent 'floating signifier' (Hall, 1997a; 1997b) that was noticeable during the research interview. Research has suggested that the perceived gender differences of researcher and participants can create a difference in the way interviews are collected and discussed (Fontana and Frey, 2000), with women being more able to develop a better rapport because they are perceived less threatening and able to communicate better (Warren, 1988). However, there is mostly anecdotal evidence for this assertion (Padfield and Procter, 1996), and most of the research was historically carried out by female researchers on women participants (Finch, 1984) in the midst of the development of a feminist research paradigm. In the study, one of the fathers commented that he would not have spoken more freely if I was a man, and that it had been a surprise to him about the amount of information he shared. This cannot be classed as a comparative truism of statement about a female researcher being more adept at interviewing men. However, it is worth noting in this study.

### Lessons: Power roles and gender within interview relationships

On reflection, this perceived social construction that women are better at developing a rapport than men influenced my preparation for the interviews. I argued that my role as a researcher may counter balance the implied power differences between the gender roles. Indeed, I felt that I was in control of the interview experience, possibly because of my own previous professional experience of working with men in communities such as this. This

would contradict feminist writers who suggest an interview is a traditionally masculine paradigm (Oakley, 1981), where women's participation in research was overshadowed by a male authority in research as well as society (Obbo, 1997). However, in this study, the converse could be argued as relevant. Parenting has been traditionally a female domain, and participation in research of fathers in areas of disadvantage in research is rare. Add to this, the positionality of power dynamics of a researcher and a father who by the nature of attending in a parenting group may have had recent or ongoing personal difficulties, leading to vulnerability. This would suggest a tip in the power scales to possibly at least an equal footing. Interestingly, however, the power imbalances of the gender roles were still in play. This was highlighted in Warren's (1988) work, where sexual overtures were present in some research. I may have had excellent communication skills and rapport, but this did not stop me feeling slightly uncomfortable around one father, in part due to the tension around the first meeting, but I was aware of his physicality and strength. At the end of one interview, another participant jokingly asked me out on a date, which I managed to make a joke out of, but this took me off guard. It is worth noting here that I did not feel that I was intimidated by these men enough to flag up as a possible risk on the university ethics form. But, it was a classic everyday observation of the roles of gender construction at play within sociocultural and relational settings. It is worthy of note not only for data collection and analysis purposes, but to highlight a gender interplay that can be felt in interview relationships between socially constructed gender roles.

#### Stage 5: Communicating finished re-presentation to participants:

At this point, there was an unexpected personal and ethical dilemma in the way that I communicated the analysing and re-presenting of the narratives between myself and the fathers post-interview stage. Previous narrative research suggests that communicating with participants post-interview stage does not necessarily strengthen rigour and could compromise the 'unique contribution that systemic and thoughtfully carried out qualitative research can make' (Barbour, 2001, p. 1115). There are also numerous narrative research studies that do not use consent at post interview stage in research with participants (Josselson, 2007; Smythe and Murray, 2000; Chase, 1996). Although technically my method

of gaining consent could be justified, I struggled with the possible perceived lack of respect for the fathers by not communicating with them during the process of analysis and representation. I was also worried that the consent form had overlooked issues around representation of data, which had the possibility of angering participants because of a perceived misinterpretation (see Vidich and Bensman, 1968). In narrative research, there is also an emphasis on the values of the relationship built when listening to someone's life story (Bergum and Dossetor, 2005; Ellis, 2017). This created an emotional conversation at the write-up stage of the thesis with my supervisors that led to a plan of action to mitigate these concerns. This is discussed in the next section.

#### Lessons: Informed consent v broad consent or process consent

Although I had verbally discussed with some of the men that my interpretation of what they said might be different from what they meant, I realise that I had not thought this through whilst designing the information sheet and consent form. This was not an oversight at the time of ethical approval for the study, but an outcome of the natural dynamic changes that occur within a research study that I could not have predicted at the start of this research. Although in narrative research, ethical issues such as consent are continually re-negotiated (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) it is sometimes not fully explicit as to how this is re-negotiated with the participants (Tolich, 2017). For example, the right to withdraw is a common feature of a consent form, but how this would happen is not necessarily clear in narrative studies in light of any issues that could arise (Tolich, 2017). In addition, van den Hoonaard (2017) expresses problems of procedural ethics regulations that are used at the start of research projects. These relate to signing a consent form, the exaggeration of risk, and member checking. He states that these are not conducive to narrative research studies and create a procedural problem in light of using them. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Tolich (2017) further argues that it is difficult to consider informed consent in narrative research because of the vagueness of the research process; there is no real way of knowing how research will unfold (Smythe and Murray, 2000). Tolich (2017) argues that the only way to ensure ethically considerate consent is to use broad consent where a researcher discusses

with the participant the limits of the research process, and then the participant gifts the interview to the researcher for their unspecified research. This is, in principle, what happened in the study and what was signed on the consent form. However, I do not feel this was explicit enough in my discussions with the men in the study. The consent form (Appendix 5) was also ambiguous and was open to multiple interpretations. Without clear explanation, there is a risk that the research could be perceived as data grab (Tolich, 2017) *on* fathers rather than *with* them (Hammersley, 2014). I felt, therefore that it was important for me to communicate with the fathers prior to publication. In my defence, van den Hoonaard (2017) and Tolich's (2017) work was published at the start of the analysis and write-up stage. With hindsight it would have been easier to seek consent at different stages of the research process. Also, the right to withdraw could then be mediated at different points with clearer communication between both researcher and participant. This, defined as process consent (Tolich, 2017), is an active construction and formalises the process more clearly than was anticipated in this study (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

To mitigate some of the worries around respect and relationships with the fathers, I contacted the three fathers in the study after my analysis/ re-presentation and asked them if I could send them a copy of their re-presentation. I that I had changed some of the information to fictionalise their accounts so that they had a minimal risk of being recognised. I talked to them about how during the process, I have taken steps to maintain their narrative as they told it, but that it may well be interpreted differently by me because I am not them. I asked their permission to publish their section of the research which includes an in-depth element of their narratives. If they had refused, which was possible, then their narrative section would be taken out of any publication, however it could be argued the interpretation is still owned by the researcher. As Tolich (2017) suggests, the participants' story is owned by them, the analysis is owned by the researcher, and the final sign off is that of the participants. Thankfully, all three fathers agreed to publication.

## Transcription

It would do an injustice to the narrative process to suggest that analysis or interpretation happens at the end of the methodological journey. Transcription is part of the analytical process. Reflexivity and journal logs happen throughout the process of transcription, and these form the basis of interpretation and re-presentation of the transcribed text and subsequent findings. It is at the point of transcription that there is a commencement of analysis away from the interview environment and away from the co-constructed interview exchange of fathers. Transcription is the point at which the spoken word of the interview, which was audio-recorded, is re-presented in text. This study is viewed as a situated political act that 'reflects transcribers' analytic or political bias and shapes the interpretation and evaluation of speakers, relationships, and contexts depicted in the transcript' (Jaffe, 2000, p. 500). This contrasts with viewing transcription as a transparent and objective act within research methodology (Roberts, 1997; Atkinson, 1992). Exploring the decisions based on transcription allows scrutiny of the non-objective situated state of the researcher and allows the process to be held up to scrutiny. With this in mind, there are three main areas of transcription (Green, *et al.*, 1996) which need clarification for this study; the way in which theory is reflected in the transcription process, the use of other tools in the interview process that mediates transcription and analysis, and how the socio-cultural habits of a researcher will affect transcription and interpretive decisions.

Firstly, the decisions of how to re-present the data rely on the theoretical need of the research study (Ochs, 1979). Different transcription conventions are used to mediate the philosophical assumptions of a study (Mishler, 1991). This study relates to the relational description of identity capital using a narrative inquiry method. As reflected in the pilot, this study is more than scanning stories for words that signal elements of identity capital theory. It does not need a full set of transcription apparatus, as may be seen in discourse analysis or conversation analysis (Wengraf, 2004). The interview was transcribed verbatim and respected the interviewer in the co-construction of the interview by making them visible where the interviewer's utterances and questions are part of the transcription (Reissman, 2008). However, the intricacy of transcription reflected the purpose and the epistemological



stance of the study. It is less concerned with the style of the transcription (Gee, 1991; Labov, 1982; Glesne, 1997), for example, whether there is a three-second or five-second pause is not relevant, as I am not looking for meaning in the two fewer seconds. If there is a long pause, it is noted as an observation and put in double parenthesis (see Appendix 8), but the meaning of three or five seconds is it is argued not particularly relevant to this study. This is because, for this study, the meaning is produced and is able to be re-produced in a given culture or across cultures (Hall, 1997a; Foucault, 1972). This is in contrast with using transcriptions that turn language into constant indicators, devoid of meaning beyond their function of defining identity capital. Granted, there will be words and phrases that will be analysed in this study, but this is not the main purpose of transcription. This study uses some of the transcription conventions, which are closely linked to Wengraf (2004), Silverman's (1997), Morgan's (2014) transcription symbols (Appendix 8). Most use similar conventions. I have chosen ones that are easy to understand and do not complicate the reading of the transcription for non-trained people and the re-production into text for analysis and reading by others.

Apart from changing names for anonymity, I added words in a different font to indicate where I have changed words to fit in with the idea of fictionalisation for privacy reasons. These fonts are not present in the completed re-presentation. Also, numbered lines are used to make it easier to navigate the text and refer to specific sections. The layout format has columns on the right side for rudimentary first draft analysis and notes during listening to the transcription (Appendix 9) as suggested by Wengraf, (2017) as part of the pre, during and post reflection notes aid the analytical process. The transcription is initially written on a Word document and then transferred to NVivo for organisational purposes.

Secondly, transcription is mediated by the knowledge gained from notes and reflexive journals during the interview stages (Greene, *et al.*, 1997), which are usually spread across a desk during the process and read and re-read to aid meaning during transcription. Field notes during interviews help with remembering the situated side of the interview, and reflective accounts aid feelings and thoughts that may mediate an interpretive response. For example, an Asterix (\*) on my notes from interviews, related to when the participant becomes animated, usually in the retelling. There are also points where laughs, elongated vowels,

specific eye contact, and loud talking are noted in double brackets, which help try to make sense of meaning. This also flagged for me an in-PIN moment (in a particular incident narrative) (Wengraf, 2004) which is a way of identifying a way to record the animated responses of participants that are not captured via audio recording (Mishler, 1991). I noticed from the pilot experience of this study that the meaning of such movements when a participant is recalling events, in detail, from their memories could indicate an in PIN moment, which indicates a narrative. This does not denote a need to psychoanalyse the response but, I believe, could be an indicator that the participant is in the moment, re-telling the story as they see it in detail. These meanings are mediated by sharing a speech community (Morgan, 2014), where the language used, the utterances, gestures, and ways of conversation, construct meaning in a certain culture and society.

This leads to the third observation on interpretation. The researchers' own positioning and habits will mediate the way the transcription is re-presented. This has already been discussed in detail in the previous sections on positionality. However, it is worth noting the emphasis on meaning. A researchers' interpretation of meaning from gestures, tones, etc. needs to be justified (Polkinghorne, 2007), which is linked to researchers' own language ideology, and its perceived meaning. Writing down what is heard or seen is an interpretive act and relates to the researchers' knowledge of the culture studied (Green, *et al.*, 1996). Transcribing a pause, a quiet recollection, or an animated response and interpreting it will be reliant on the socio-cultural and experiential norms of the researcher. However, from a social constructionist perspective 'meanings are not private and subjective events, but public and shared' (Gergen and Gergen, 1993, p. 192), and within any co-construction and interview it can be implied there is always 'mutually intelligible symbolic and ideologic communicative system at play' (Morgan, 2014, p. 1), where meaning is shared across social situations. As Crites (1971 p.291) describes:

‘The way people speak, dance, build, dream, embellish, is to be sure always culturally particular: it bears the imprint of a time and a place. A people speaks a particular language, not the same as that spoken in another land nor quite the that spoken by their fathers, and each person adapts it with some originality own use. But the fact that people speak some language is no historical accident. It is a necessary mark of being human, i.e., being capable of having a history. That is also true of other persistent forms of cultural expression. They are conditions of historical existence; their expressions are moulded in the process itself into definite products of particular culture.’

(Crites, 1971, p.291)

Of course, it is clearly impossible to know a person from their own perspective. In this study, I was an outsider as much as I was an insider. It could be argued that I had local cultural knowledge and was part of the speech community and aware of many of the language choices and variations that were used to portray the meaning of the experiences in the narratives of men (Morgan, 2014). This would make some issues of interpretation easier for me, but this would also offer blind spots to other meanings. As Trahar (2018) states, when being empathic, we can sometimes miss something. This, I believe, is especially the case when a researcher is close to the culture being researched. I navigated this situation by flagging any section that I felt resonated with my own life story or that I understood and reflected on other possible interpretations outside of my own realm of experience. This allowed me to be more cautious in the way I analysed the transcriptions, especially when ascribing meaning to sections.

### Using ‘eye dialect’ in transcription

This study uses some forms of *eye dialect* which capture the socio-cultural ways in which men in the study speak. There are some writers that avoid eye dialect because of the discriminatory and prejudice perception of those speaking the words (Roberts Powers, 2005; Preston, 1982) and changing words into a form conveniences those who are interpreting it by improving the quality of texts to study (Ives, 1950; Preston, 1982). Whilst clarity is important, taking this stance can underestimate the power of the narrative and spoken word, and puts into question the power-related in those who choose what words to re-represent in

transcription. Changing words such as 'gonna,' 'dunno,' 'I done,' to 'going to,' 'I don't know' and 'I did,' may fail to transport the reader into the socio-cultural world of the fathers in this study. Although it is reported that there are numerous ways in which a research study is re-represented, 'cleaning up' such dialectical differences strips and sanitises the text for sociocultural meaning and quality. Fine (1983) ponders, what would Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and Mark Twain's writing be like without such attention to tones and dialects? This study celebrates the culture and a positive way of re-presentation and re-presents a 'positive pride' (Fine, 1983, p. 324) in the differences of language, speech, and fundamentally class. This turns away from some of the rhetoric which pushes towards social mobility and an underclass/working-class transformation through a Pygmalion approach to a standardisation of knowing and understanding a specific culture, especially those who are living in areas of disadvantage (McInerney, 2016). However, if there were to be words or sentences that may be difficult to understand those outside of the culture, it will be denoted in the text in brackets beside the word that may help the reader to understand further. Interestingly, this does not frequently happen in the transcription of the study.

### The importance of keeping the whole in mind

This study uses the suggestion of Holloway and Jefferson, (2000), to keep the whole in mind. The transcription itself was firstly written in Word, and transferred to NVivo11, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) tool that helps organise the transcriptions for analysis. NVivo is useful to reduce data and highlight certain similarities in stories which is the usual starting point in analytical procedures (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). However, all CAQDA have their limitations. Holloway and Jefferson, (2000) suggest that it can sometimes be taken as the basis for the whole of the data analysis and that it can restrict researchers in their quest to analyse in a broader sense (Richards and Richards, 1994). It may also lull a researcher into a false sense of security, just because it is on a computer-aided program. This happened in the first round of analysis of Tomas' transcription, which was used as a pilot of the study. I found myself with a plethora of codes and themes, without any meaning. This was something that I had noted was not the objective of the study. It is worth noting that unlike parts of grounded theory, narrative analysis strives to preserve 'sequence and wealth

of detail' (Reissman, 2008, p. 74). Its main objective, although interesting as an end analysis, is not used to theorise across cases, but flows from a case-centred approach. This case-centred approach describes not only each story as a unit but also the fathers who are part of the study from areas of disadvantage (Reissman, 2008, p. 74). I managed this issue by ensuring that I saw themes within each case study as an interlinking part of the bigger narrative and reported on it as such.

### The Narrative Analysis/ Interpretation Process

When you are preparing for a journey, you own the journey. Once you've started the journey, the journey owns you.

(Shope, 2006, p. 165)

Using a constructionist approach supports the idea of making the building blocks clear in analysis that uses the 'whole' as the analytical unit of inquiry. This leads to a worthwhile distinction between the word *analysis* and *interpretation* for this study. When thinking about the term analysis, this tends to point towards isolation of aspects of the researched phenomenon, where interpretation can be thought about as the intention to understand meanings, actions, or episodes (ten Have, 1990). In this case, both analysis and interpretation are used as signifiers in this study of the whole narrative, as there are specific points where one or the other are used in the process.

The processes of narrative analysis are varied and 'polymorphous' (Hyvärinen, 2008, p. 447). Historically, narrative analysis was concerned with the form of narrative structural models of story-telling (Propp, 1968; Labov and Waletzky, 1997). As narrative inquiry became more popular, there were several critiques of the structural models. These were directed at the lack of attention to the interview context, the lack of consideration of place, and the fact that in intensive biographical research, participants rarely provided a structured chronological account (Mishler, 1997). Contributing to this was the way in which the methods took out sections of text and fitted them into the models (Hyvärinen, 2008). In the case of

interpretation, this study emphasises narrative analysis 'as sense-making process rather than as a finished product in which loose ends knit together into a single story-line' (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 15). It focusses more on the 'told', rather than the structure of the 'telling' (Reissman, 2008, p. 54; Mishler, 1995). This is highlighted by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), where narrative analysis leads to a variety of complex inter-relational possibilities (Mills, 1940; Reissman, 1993; Bahktin, 1981) that calls for the explanation of the context and of a wider view of textual analysis that encourages a vision of narratives as 'self-sufficient wholes' (Hyvärinen, 2008, p. 451). Polymorphous activity in this study is celebrated. However, situating a study in a generally relativist approach creates its own problems. For example, it is rare to find any research that shows account of just *how* to analyse narrative data (Andrews, Squire, and Tamaboukou, 2013). If there are allusions to ways, they can sometimes be sketchy (Huber, Milne, and Hyde, 2017). For example, whilst researching a way of structuring this analysis, it was by reading Reissman's, (2008, p.63-64) five paragraph account of personal communications with Mary Tamaboukou on how she adopted thematic analysis in her work (see Tamboukou, 2003) that provided the most direction for this study.

The most natural starting point of analysis is in an interest in the text for surface level themes (Reissman, 2008; Tamboukou, 2003). Nevertheless, the interpretation of the narratives in a social constructionist study happens on a deeper contextual level. These relate to the socio-cultural, historical, and relational aspects of the narrative that are mediated by the underpinning elements of social constructionism (Esin, *et al.*, 2014). This allows for different and possibly contradictory levels of meaning (Andrews Squire, and Tamaboukou, 2013) of individuals, groups and society that permeate society through knowledge derived from grand narratives. Without such analysis, it can be a decontextualizing or even an under-contextual practice (Goodson, 2017).

## The stages of analysis

The analysis was carried out in different steps. The study is mediated by the work of Riessman (2008) and Tamboukou (2003) whereby a thematic approach was taken to analysing the textual data. These are set into five specific steps that move from nominal level analysis to issues from theoretical questions (TQ's) from the study, to research concept statements, expressed experiences, themes that require further exploration of the literature and puzzles contradictions, and paradoxes. This is merely a form of organising data rather than reporting, and all of these steps will be amalgamated and used to create a shaped, satisfying, complex, and interesting findings section.

Themes in this study are described as *something significant about the data in line with the research objective*. It needs to re-present some level of pattern in the response or meaning within the narratives. This happens whilst analysing one story or by considering all of them as a unit. They do not have to be recurring themes, maybe two out of several narrative cases (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This supports the focus on 'point' rather than analysing it for its spoken word (Riessman, 2008 p.62; Ewik and Sibley, 2003), although some words, sections and phrases are used to highlight certain interpretations. Data are collected and analysed by starting with what is known, usually from grand narrative observations, and then through data that does not fit the predefined knowledge of the subject. This explanation can seem a little thematically top-heavy. However the process becomes clearer by considering the step-by-step approach and the underpinning theoretical justifications for each. It is worth noting that this is a very linear way of looking at the analysis. In practice, this as a process is messy, jumping back and forth, reading and re-reading parts of the transcript and making notes, amending, and linking to other steps. If this was as structured as is written here, there would be no meaning-making. Revisiting data over a period of time is common in research as things sometimes change from collection to interpretation. This leads to ways of hearing and seeing the data in different ways, commonly related to a researchers' change in their own life experiences (Andrews, 2008), and a chance to reflect more deeply on what is important in the analysis. This section should not be rushed. It is worked on, left, digested, re-read, and read again. There are also points in which the audio tape is also re-heard which gave a reminder that it was not words on a written paper but a human being in a research interview.

Here is a description of the five-step analytical process used for each narrative:

### Step 1: Nominal level analysis

This process happens during the collection of notes and reflections collected before, during and after the interview process, during transcription and on the re-reading of the transcription. It focusses on the 'words and phrases that strike' a researcher as interesting or useful to the research question (Riessman, 2008 p.68). It was important to have repeated readings of the transcription and read in an active way for meanings or patterns of talk (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The re-reading was done in stages, after taking some time to digest what had been highlighted, usually in NVivo11, and in the comments section of the interview transcript. I returned to see if there was anything to add. This process enabled reflexive notes and thoughts that can be pinned on to other steps within the process.

In this section, it is also worth noting that I took care to log the un-emotional, the flyaway comments that did not affect me. This section is not just based on personal feelings that came from reading and listening, but a re-read of the transcript and audio looking for comments that may be part of the fathers' story which affected them personally. These are sentences and words we all use in our own narratives that define our identities. For example, in discussing my child's father, I will generally mention him 'as the man who made him'. This is not a derogatory term in my narrative, but denotes the difference between a father with a name and a man who chose not to be a father. The way in which people would interpret such terms may be through identifying me as a hostile rejected person or a woman of agency who definitively respects the role of a father. These contradictions link with Step 5 in the process but are generally considered as words as a starting point in this stage of the process.

### Step 2: Statements that relate to the research question

As is discussed in Stage 4 of the research process, The central research question (CRQ) of *How is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?*, is underpinned by Theoretical Questions (TQ's) that are taken from the topic of interest and considered in the literature review (see figure 6). The TQs are mediated by



what is known about the grand narratives of fathers in areas of disadvantage. As described previously, these TQ's will be subject to change may be subject to change as a researcher learns more about the subject. I read and re-read the transcripts, concentrating on responses to the TQs, and I wrote about these in the re-presentation of the narrative. Many of the TQs merged in to one question at this point. This facilitated a simpler way of presenting the data. There were also further TQs that were specific to each father's life story, which led the analysis into theoretical literature such as relationships, culture, fatherhood, and violence. These are discussed in further detail in each of the father's narratives in Chapter 5.

### Step 3: Expressed experiences

Experience is a word that is used indiscriminately throughout narrative inquiry text. As Atkinson (2005) suggests, categories of experience are sometimes treated in an unproblematic way. It is used haphazardly and frequently, a kind of ethereal analysis for research. Experience supposedly exceeds philosophy (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), in which 'there is no substitute for experience, none at all' (Maslow, 1966, p. 45). This suggests an element of reality, a stubborn focus on the words used in which someone's experience trumps a philosophical view of a research approach. This is not the case in this research. This study defines experience as human expression, a way of making sense of the world that focusses on the description of identity capital in this thesis. The expression of experience shares the cultural, social, relational, and/or historical nature of a person's narrative, as a socially constructed reality (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Bruner, 1991; Gergen and Gergen, 1993). For example, Plummer's (1995; 2001), narratives of lesbian and gay 'coming out' stories featured historical and social elements of how the transformation occurred in the life stories of his participants. This study focusses on issues that are perceived to mediate the narrative itself (Squire, 2008), and accepts elements of the micro and macro relational world as a form of analysis.

The experiences will relate to the underpinning TQs, but this is not prescriptive. There will be parts from stage 1 and 2 that form a more holistic view of identity capital than that which was gleaned from the TQs. A way of organising such experiences can be drawn from

Tamboukou's (2003) work where she uses verbs to account for experiences; "*Go out, get out, spread my wing, run away, leave*" (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 58) and created a theme of 'confinement' in her narrative analysis. I take a similar view to Tamboukou, where I look for sentences or words that describe a state of doing and action (verb), or description (metaphor), that underpin the part of the narrative experience. This is then named as something that I feel corresponds with the experience. Of course, this is a re-presentation.

#### Step 4: Themes that require further exploration of literature

Here, there is a deeper analysis of issues, problems, or perspectives that were not highlighted in the literature review. These may potentially contradict or conform to the grand narratives discussed in Chapter 2. They will be interrogated historically, culturally, and relationally. These issues are examined from this set process. For example, a fathers' story might relate to how important his relationship was with a probation officer, by it encouraging his love of his children. In this event, more evidence from further specific literature research concerned with the justice system and probation would be incorporated into the findings section of the study. These themes could stand alone in one of the case studies or be cross-sectional to other narratives in the study. I did not incorporate the stand-alone themes into the literature review at the start of this study. This, I felt, would make a reader feel as if I had researched such issues beforehand. Instead, I discussed such themes and issues as they were analysed and reported in the narratives. This allowed me to be clear about what I knew before the study from grand narratives in Chapter 2, and the further literature which was highlighted from stories in the case studies of fathers.

## Step 5: Puzzles, paradoxes and contradictions

‘Paradoxes...seem to smile ironically out of nicely constructed theories with their clear-cut distinctions and point at an unthought-of possibility, a blind spot in oppositional thinking.’

(Yebema, 1996, p. 40)

Some situations within narratives are ‘riddled with paradox...’ (Bruner and Gorfain, 1984, p. 66). In this study, Step 5 offers a way of analysing a narrative in a completely different way. It also allows for the celebration of the complexity of humankind in narrative analysis and is an exciting element of the hours spent reading and re-reading the same texts. For example, a participant may discuss his dislike of any authoritarian woman but go on to narrate a story whereby one helped him overcome a difficult part of his life and that he was grateful for it. This would imply a contradiction in the story itself. Another may talk about the mental health issues that prevent them from leaving the house but proceed to discuss an in-depth story of working in Dad’s groups and going on holiday with extended family and friends. These are interesting parts of any narration and are very common in life stories (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). However, it was noted in my pilot analysis that it could encourage a researcher to turn detective and take each story to court as trial and jury based on their narratives. A reflection on the analysis of Tomas’ text showed some judgemental attitudes creeping into my writing. This, I suggest, is where a researcher using the same philosophical approach as this study can become unstuck. It is easy to play ‘true or false’ with the paradoxes in the story, and to forget the small story of the Mullah in the opening of this chapter namely, ‘*to interpret and to state Truths are two quite different things*’ (Patton, 2015, p. 625). Looking for meanings that are hidden, or unconscious (Ricoeur, 1991) because of paradoxes, are just the same as ‘mining’ or ‘extracting’ information in research interviews (Kvale, 1996). This unfairly judges a participants’ narrative or insists on motivations or deserved consequences (Shuman, 2005).

There needs to be an awareness that surface-level analysis of puzzles, paradoxes, and contradictions can lead to the furthering of the exact cultural and social gaps (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) that this study aims to close. Also, there may well be an ‘intertextual gap’ (Briggs and Bauman, 1992) which might lead to readers of this thesis to re-interpret and re-

present the initial ‘point’ (Reissman, 2008, p. 62) of the narrative. This can lead to a misunderstanding of the purpose of the research and narratives in general (Shuman, 2005). In its most sinister form, this could lead to it being exploited for unintended purposes leading to further alienate the specified group of people that participate in this study. Paradoxes, puzzles, and contradictions are normal in the life stories of people. In this research, the weight of reasoning for such ‘normal anomalies’ are balanced with the focus on the socio-cultural and historical, whilst being aware of the judgements, motivations or perceived deserved consequences in the analysis and its re-presentation.

A Framework for Re-presenting Narratives: ‘To interpret and to state Truths are two quite different things’

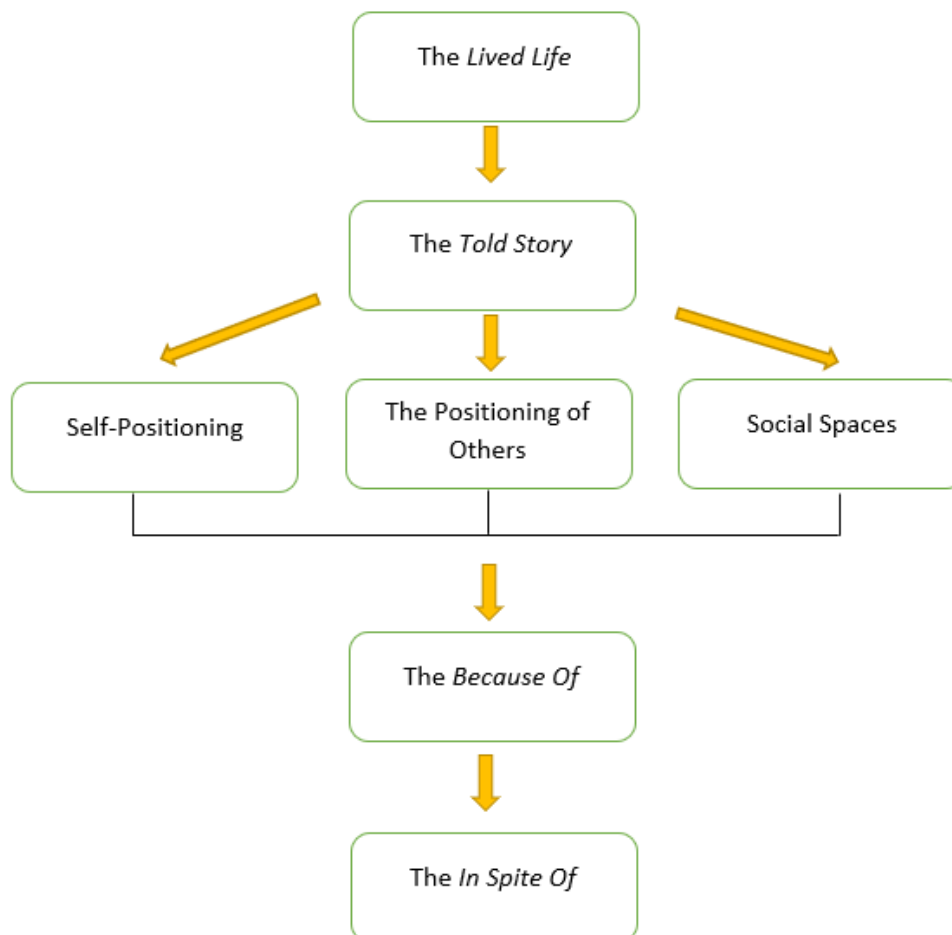


Figure 14: Framework for narrative re-presentation of identity capital

The framework above (Figure 14) follows the intention of the study; to understand how fathers construct their identity capital based on its description in this study. The analysis and the re-presentation of the findings are interwoven (Hunter, 2010) to create a dialogue through each of the narratives. Re-presenting of narratives will never be a neutral act, but it is the responsibility of a researcher to analyse and interpret the stories told in order to express important messages (Burne, 2015), whilst honouring the narrative of fathers. There will inevitably be gaps in the lived life and told story. In this study, gaps in the told story are not filled however, by further questioning. Gap filled narratives can be far removed from the narrative of the participant (Spence, 1986). This can lead to a 'smoothing' of the story told (Kim, 2015) where there is a feeling that there must be an unbroken story with all details collected in sequence and order. Although it is common to analyse the narratives for some type of chronological order, this study respects that narratives are told through a 'multidimensional vortex rather than a linear chronology' (Shuman, 2005 p.3).

Firstly, as in classic BNIM, there will be two sections; a chronological report, the *Lived Life* (Wengraf, 2004), and the *Told Story* (Figure 12 below). The *Lived Life* is a descriptive summary of the information given by the father through their narratives and by using the demographic questionnaire (Appendix 6). This summary is used to make the father 'come alive to the reader' (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 70). The *Told Story* (Wengraf, 2004), is interpretive and is divided into sub-sectional themes related to identity capital as described in this study. The *Told Story* is divided into three subsections that were chosen to highlight different positions whereby identity capital could be seen as constructed in the narrative, namely, self-positioning, positioning by others, and social spaces. These are chosen to include other perspectives rather than a philosophical choice or signifier in terms of positionality theory (for example, Harré 1999). In each narrative, the order of each will be dependent on which order they appear in each story. Words or phrases used by the fathers are used to elaborate a narrative under each subsection. For example, in Tomas' narrative, these words are cake, cars, and quiet and loud. The words are not related to identity capital *per se* but are taken from the fathers' own narratives (Hunter, 2010). By doing this, the narrative flows in a way that considers the richness of the story and keeps the narrative as a whole rather than segmenting it. The way in which the subsections are organised also respects that there are

numerous ways in which identity capital is experienced in each narrative. Therefore, there cannot be a stringent way of ordering the subsections in each narrative. This shows the interconnectedness of how identity capital is experienced and how these layers cannot be considered in isolation.

Following these subsections, I use the categories *Because Of* and *In Spite Of* to emphasise the way that resources are mediated in positive and negative ways in the life story of the fathers. The *Because Of* explores in further depth how identity capital may have been compromised with an emphasis on relational agency. The *In Spite Of* element explores the father's ability to use his identity capital resources even though there were specific barriers to gaining such capital. These elements are also attributed to relational agency by offering a glimpse into some of the most important aspects of the fathers' life experiences which enable them to enhance their lives both individually and socially. A reflection on the use of these headings can be found in the discussion chapter. There is also further discussion in Chapter 6 that considers some of the salient issues in each narrative. This is important because these issues could be lost within each section and not considered throughout the case studies as a whole. This gives a perspective of the issues facing fathers within these areas that mediate their identity capital, *because of* and *in spite of* the relationships around them, whilst still allowing the fathers' narratives to have a prominent position within the text.

It is worth noting that the transcription symbols are used in the passages of Tomas, Rob, and Adam's narrative in the subsequent chapter. There is one addition, namely the symbol "(.....)". This is to denote that the passage was taken out of a longer passage of the father's narrative. This means that the transcription carried on, usually talking about something that was not relevant to the point that needed to be made. I constructed this symbol, which is different from a "..." in a general referenced quote or the way that a statement is made without question ("you say you were moving out...") to show that the story telling continues.

## Voice in research findings

The term voice is used to explain how the narratives are re-presented, so the interpretation of words is better at carrying meaning (Elbow, 2007). This study re-presents the data from three perspectives in all parts of the framework by highlighting:

1. the voices of the fathers in their *Told Story* (insider voice),
2. how the grand narratives relate to the *Told Story* (outsider voice)
3. my own interpretation of the *Told Story* (personal voice)

Voice in reporting research findings will inevitably include both individual and social dimensions (Tardy, 2012). My approach is underpinned by the discussion of insider and outsider positionality in this thesis and writings of voice in research (Tardy, 2012; Matsuda, 2011, 2015; Prior, 2001; Elbow, 2007). This method allows for an amalgamation rather than a binary approach to reporting on the personal and social voice (Prior, 2001). Within the text, the fathers' narratives are re-presented by an indentation on the page. These are verbatim with minor changes in line with anonymity and fictionalisation. The outsider voice and my personal voice intermingle in the interpretation of the narrative. The outsider voice is registered as a more formal academic voice, where a passive voice is used to depersonalise the text. My personal voice is an active voice and can be signalled by the use of personal pronouns. These are consciously intermingled at times because of the acceptance that my interpretation and the grand narratives sit outside of the insider voice of the father.

I take my responsibility seriously to communicate the perspectives of those within the research (Patton, 2015). However, there is a recognition that there is inequity in the voices of the report. Outsider interpretations of people in areas of disadvantage often take precedent (Swanson, 2004; Ferguson, 2013). The literature on fathers' experiences in areas of disadvantage or my interpretations can tip the power balance and may take priority. The way in which the data is reported can mediate the power of such knowledge (see Lather, (1991),

discussing Mulkey's (1985) work). As is the focus of narrative methodology, the emphasis is weighted towards the participants' narrative as they are experts in their 'own ways of seeing' (Schostak, 2006, p. 146). The three voices in the findings are re-presented to respect the humanity and existence between self and others (Buber, 2000; Patton, 2015) and in a non-hierarchical way (Prior, 2001). This is achieved by making each section distinct without necessarily pulling each voice apart. The fathers' narratives take precedent in each case study.

This leads to two further concerns in the re-presentation of voice during this process; how I position my own voice and how the reader views these voices. I am conscious that re-presenting others' experiences could be considered presumptuous (Turvey, 2017). As a researcher, I have the power to tell the story (Burne, 2015). However, I am alone in re-presenting and interpreting the stories until they are read by others. This is one stage within the research process which, could be argued, is not co-constructed. My voice, style, and personalised interpretations are connected to praxis, the understanding that all of these reflect personal social, political, and moral ideals. These are automatically reflected in the cross-over where voice meets reflexivity. The way in which I express my personal interpretations in this section reflects this cross-over (Patton, 2015). My voice is used within the sections as a stylistic way of interpreting the narratives, which sometimes shifts from descriptive interpretations to narrative prose itself.

It is impossible for a researcher to know the intentions of a reader of a research study. Readers may pass judgement and assumptions on writers, especially if they are invisible in the research process (Matsuda and Tardy, 2007; Tardy and Matsuda, 2009). Readers will make judgements and assumptions based on their own needs from the research. This is celebrated in this study, accepting that the study is a co-construction or re-presentation of the narrative and has a dialogic relationship that includes the reader (Tardy, 2012). To create dialogue, I refer back to the ideas of legitimising research (Etherington, 2009; Richardson, 2000) whereby there needs to be an emotional and intellectual effect on the reader that moves the reader to consider new ways of thinking or action. To do this, I strive to bring to



life the father's own narrative and sensitively consider how it mediates the other voices in the research. The narratives of fathers come first. I have constructed myself into the whole research process as much as possible, therefore mitigating the need to imagine a certain voice of an invisible researcher.

In concluding the chapter it is worth reflecting back to the end quote of Halcom's parable where the Mullah encourages the young man to "*Seek what you will, do what you must*" (Patton, 2015, p.652). There are a number of decisions made on the methodological journey that needed to be made in the moment, and may not have been considered before the start of the journey itself. Ontological and epistemological considerations led to understanding what constituted legitimate research in narrative inquiry, concerns around 'Truth' framed the process and encapsulated the relationships between the fathers as narrators, me as a researcher and their narratives of others. Reflexivity allowed for questions and diversions in process related to ethics, 'insider' and 'outsider' positionality, reciprocity, emotionality and the relational. Emboldenment in the narratives, rather than mistruth or a deceit, acts as a word that conjures up a strength and power within a narrative, and proved a stopping point to ponder reasons why stories may be emboldened and why stories may always be untold. Throughout the journey there were lessons highlighted that were learning points along the way. Being prepared for anything and not assuming an easy ride, testing for trust between a participant and the researcher, power roles and gender plays with regards to a female researcher interviewing men, and issues related to informed consent were all points in which deeper discussion and made for decisions that deviated from a perceived methodological plan. This preconceived 'Truth' of a planned methodological processes indeed "...needed to be killed" (Patton, 2015, p.652), just as it states the parable. If there were only one 'Truth' applied in methodological research processes, there would be a shallow understanding of the human condition, a missing out of vital parts and a possible addition to grand narrative thinking without exploration. Interpretation or the re-interpretation of the narratives was similar to finding a river that needed to be crossed on the methodological journey and having to build a boat of random floatable materials to cross the river without getting wet. The instructions from locals (previous suggestions from other research into narrative inquiry) for building a boat (the analysis) would be pretty generalised but by using what was known and adding further parts, the boat manages to cross the river quite well and I was also able to

leave instructions for others to help them in the future. This is what the Mullah in the parable would call "*learning to interpret*" (Patton, 2015, p.652), and this too included instructions on what to do with puzzles, paradoxes, contradictions and blueprint for re-presenting the finished article (the framework for re-presenting narratives). In conclusion, the methodological process needed space to change and grow in line with the needs of the study. It also needed to be on the wrong path on times, and to be reminded that this was not a quest for 'Truth', but a specified process of showing what was done and how it was done to enable legitimate re-presentations of the narrative life stories of Tomas, Rob, and Adam.

## Chapter 5: Tomas, Rob, and Adam: Lived Lives and Told Stories

This chapter sets out the three fathers narrative life stories using the framework for re-presenting narratives set out in the previous chapter. It considers the *Lived Life*, the *Told Story* as well as the positioning of others, social spaces and self-positioning. This framework for re-presenting narratives (Figure 13) enables the stories to be read in a structured way and helps form the foundations of analysis seen in the next chapter. Each re-presentation considers aspects highlighted in the previous chapter of positionality, reflexive thought, and the relational. An analysis of the narratives can be found in Chapter 6.

### Tomas' *Lived Life*

Tomas is 31 and married. He lives with his wife Sophie in a house on a large council estate with their two children, Zac (7) and Levi (3). He has a son from a previous relationship Cai (9), who he has not seen for over three years. Tomas has been coming to Dad's group for two weeks. He has suffered from poor mental health resulting in depression. Tomas loves cars. He is a competent mechanic. He keeps himself busy by restoring vintage cars with his dad and Bamps (grandad) and doing some mechanical work outside of his house for friends and family. He states he looks after his children as a full-time job.

Growing up, Tomas was one of four children in a loud, terraced household and was raised by his mum and dad who are still together. Tomas felt that his parents favoured the other children, especially his brother. Tomas states he took an interest in alcohol and drugs such as cannabis, Valium, Temazepam, and cider at around 13 to 14 years of age. He ran away from home a few times. Tomas felt an outsider in the family unit and spent a lot of time with his grandparents; his Nan and Bamps, which was a quieter place. His Nan taught him how to cook and bake, and his Bamps helped him develop a passion for mechanics and cars.

At twenty years of age, Tomas went to Canada, a move with his then-girlfriend and her family. He was working in a restaurant very long hours but had quality rest time fishing, riding

around on a grass cutter, and enjoying the weather. Six months later, his girlfriend became pregnant, and her parents threw her out of the house. They arrived back in Wales with nothing. They did not have a job or a home. They lived with Tomas' parents on a terraced street until Cai was two months old and moved into their own home not far away.

This was a turbulent time for Tomas. His relationship finished with his girlfriend, as there was physical and mental abuse from her, and he became very depressed. After one particularly violent incident where she drew a knife on him, he left with Cai, who was by then less than a year old and went to his parents' house. Tomas was working at the time as a mechanic and had to take time off to care for Cai but could not take long. Tomas then separated from his girlfriend. He asked his mother to help him for a few weeks until he organised childcare and benefits. During this time, without his knowledge, his mother was allowing his ex to have contact with Cai. One day she allowed her to take Cai to the park, and he never came back into his care. Tomas then spent six years in the court system trying to get contact with Cai. This would happen sporadically and acrimoniously. This became a very difficult time for both Cai and Tomas, as well as for Zac, his new child with his partner Sophie.

Tomas met Sophie soon after his relationship ended with his ex-partner. Zac was born two years after Cai. Tomas recounts a time where he didn't speak to his mother after Zac was born for six months because she told his ex that Zac had been born, which leaked to Facebook before he had time to tell close family. Tomas also talks about his relationship with his father as better than with his mother, and that his father often tells him not to tell his mother if he gives him a gift of money or tools.

Sophie had a serious illness during her pregnancy with Zac, and Tomas had to take full-time care duties for her, even intimate care. By the time Zac was two years old, Tomas was very depressed and often would drive in the middle of the night and often thought about ways of committing suicide so that he was not harming Cai, Zac, or Sophie. They also married when Zac was 2. Zac wore a kilt. The wedding was a happy affair. Tomas describes his love for Sophie vividly but has regretted that the first few years of the relationship were difficult. He believed that he was not there enough for Sophie and Zac and that he was depressed. There was a lack of communication. During this time, there was a solicitor's letter sent to Cai's mum explaining the situation that he was unable to complete regular visits because Sophie was so ill. This was taken out of context. Tomas did not see Cai for two years after this.

Tomas decided not to see Cai because of the emotional upset for him and Zac. This came after a particularly bad visit where he was filmed taking Cai out of the car belonging to the boyfriend of his ex. Zac was with him at the time. As time progressed, Tomas had lots of family time with both Sophie, Zac, and new baby Levi. They went to Dobie Zoo, regularly visited the local park to buy birdseed, and last summer went to Bidefield wild camping where they had a lot of fun. Tomas likes camping. The family has also bought a horse, which has made even more family time for them. They go most evenings to muck out the horse and ride it. Both Tomas and Sophie ride. Tomas learned to ride from his time with his ex, who had a horse before they moved to Canada. Tomas finds the stable a very peaceful place.

The family home is also full of animals. Tomas learned how to care for animals from his parents who bred show dogs, and he has always had a dog. The family have a Staffordshire cross mastiff called Rocky. He wanted Zac and Levi to take an interest in animal care, but Rocky was too strong to hold on his lead, so they bought a Chihuahua named Chichi. Tomas goes to Pets at Home (a pet shop) and feels sorry for the adoption of animals in there and has now acquired a hamster, a rabbit, and a cockatiel. They also have two cats, but they have left home and live with the neighbours. People tell the couple that it is about time they have another child because of the age gaps between Zac and Levi. Both Tomas and Sophie want another child, both joking that he is suppressing the urge by buying animals. He would like a little girl as he has three boys. He would think about adopting to have a girl. He says Sophie thinks he is joking, but he is serious about adopting.

### *The Told Story*

I first met Tomas at a busy Dad's group. He stood on the side quietly whilst I talked. He expressed interest in becoming part of the study, and the Dad's support worker sent me his details. We met in a local community café and discussed the project. Tomas has all three children's name tattooed on his body. Cai's name is prominent, even if Tomas is clothed. At this point, Tomas told me that he has suffered from depression, and this is why he was coming to the group as he was starting to isolate himself from others. He also told me that he was good friends with his neighbours, and they called him 'housewife,' which he laughed at

because he said he was more in tune with the more traditional female roles in the relationship than most of the people around him. This offers a possible glimpse into the structure of the society in which Tomas lives: there are specific roles that females and males do within the culture, and these are noticeable in the actions and choices of men.

We met then a month later in a local education facility close to his home. Tomas is a quiet man and softly spoken. He says it was a big thing for him to come to the facility, as he likes to stay around his own space. We started the interview, and Tomas only took 10 minutes to complete his initial sub-session interview. The whole interview lasted an hour and 50 minutes. Tomas set the scene in sub-session 1 by discussing his position within the family and gave hints of how he thought they saw him. In my experience in the pilot study, it is common in the BNIVM to take a while to warm up; hence the start of the interview does not necessarily produce a long narrative section:

Um, one of four. I describe myself as the black sheep of the family. Um, grew up in a, I would call it a loud household. Quite a lot of shouting growing up (.....) (lines: 6-8)

Quite a young age. I'd say nine or ten. I just felt I was treated differently to my older sister. And then it sort of, as my younger brother and sister were born then, I seemed to feel I was pushed to one side. They all now still live at home. I am the only one that has moved out and I feel almost ridiculed because of it. (*J: uhuh*) I don't have a particularly good relationship with my mum, my dad I'm alright with but I don't know. There wasn't a trigger of events or anything, I just found as I was growing up I spent a lot more time with my Nan and Bamps. Almost like being chipped off out of the way, sort of thing whilst everyone else was still at home (.....)

*J: you said you felt ridiculed for moving out...*

Yeah.

*J: Do you remember a particular sort of occasion when you felt that way?*

Not really, it's just, I dunno, I can't really, it's... ((long pause)) ... Silly things. My older sister, even now even though she's got a good job and earning probably on par with my dad with her earnings, they still pay for her car insurance and tax on her car. And, they still go on holidays, birthday meals I don't get an invite to. No major big thing ever happened... it's just little things.

*J: Mmmm..., Can you remember one in particular?*

One growing up was my younger brothers' birthday is two days before mine. So, we would go out for a meal on his birthday but not mine. He'd have a birthday cake and I'd have whatever was left of the birthday cake. That's the way it was. (lines: 25-39)

Although this section is questionably not a narrative in itself, this text shows the extent of how Tomas positions himself in his immediate family unit, as an outsider, and how they see him. He is born into a loud household with a lot of shouting. He is treated differently from his siblings and is ridiculed by his family for moving out. The short description of the birthday shows a way in which, even at a young age, there was a lack of thought about the effects on Tomas for having to share the leftovers of the birthday cake. However, this starting point of a young boy having leftovers of a birthday cake would become a stronger and more positive narrative as the interview progressed. It is interesting that Tomas makes it clear that there was no specific life-changing event; but alluded to the fact that it was small things, the little acts which amounted to him seeing himself as an outsider.

He mentions twice in the whole interview about him being closer to his father than his mother. There are happy times when discussing his father's part in his wedding to Sophie, and when he used to go and pick up cars with him and his grandfather. His father's relationship lies in the times where he is outside of the family home, his mother being remembered as being in the house a lot. He would be with his father either when fixing cars or in the local curry house when he was younger, where they would spend quiet times waiting for take-out food and having a few pints (his dad) and a cola (Tomas). There is kindness here, but gifts of money or things are secrets. Tomas tells of times where his dad would give him some money providing he did not to tell his mother or the others and a specific time when he gave him some mechanic tools. He mentions he did things with his father and alluded to the fact that this did not happen with his mother. But it is intonated with "Rarely,"; suggesting that this was not a regular occurrence.

I used to do things with my dad. With my mum it was always with, in the house. With my dad I'd always go to work with him on a Saturday morning and clean cars, and then my pocket money, if you like, but it was always like "don't

tell your mother". It was always you know, I'd get a tenner, I'd wash god knows how many cars that morning, and it was always like "don't tell your mother, don't tell the others". Um, used to take me to rallies and stuff to watch the racing. We actually used to do things with my dad. Rarely. He still does it now.

*J: yeah?*

Yeah. I was working on his van a couple of weeks ago, and his comment was, I needed a couple of tools and he went to pick them up, and the tools I've got are for like, cars, whereas slightly bigger things are needed for vans and commercial vehicles and he's already gone through my toolbox and realised I didn't have a couple of bits in there, so he picked them up as well. I said how much do I owe you for them, and he said "don't worry just have them. Your mother won't let me pay you for doing it so just have them instead" so my dad's always done it it's always been "shhhh! Don't tell your mother". (lines: 140-152)

It is unclear as to why Tomas' dad feels he shouldn't tell his wife about giving his son tools or some money for his work and time. Gift giving is a reciprocal element of being part of a family structure (Belk, 1979; Cheal, 1987) and plays an important role in a child's self-concept (Schwartz, 1967). It is a ritual that strengthens important relationships, even if they could be insecure (Mayet and Pine, 2010). Reflecting on my own experiences of secrecy in gift-giving in a similar cultural background, it is common in families of this culture to press money into your palm on leaving a house and whisper not to tell. In my experience, this is generally done in jest, "Shhh! Don't tell your mam!" where the family member strengthens their relationship with the child, and where the mother probably knows it happens, whilst accepting this is part of parent-child bonding. However, reading the final line of the section offers another perspective: that of a father who has been told by his wife not to pay for their own son's work. In another part of the narrative, Tomas talks about his sister being given money to pay for her car regularly, even though she lives at home and is on a better wage than her father. This level of favouritism in terms of practical help and financial support can have consequences for a mature child's well-being, especially from a mothers' differential treatment (Suitor, *et al.*, 2015). It could be argued that withholding of gifting for Tomas' tells of a negative relationship with his mother. Conversely, it could highlight differences in gender preconceptions within the culture and family structure. Maybe Tomas, being a male is seen



as needing a traditional role where he is a provider (Galinsky, *et al.*, 2011) rather than a taker and being otherwise is discouraged by the mother. The way in which both relationships play out is mirrored in the sections below. It is also worth noting the intention of the father to form a bond with his son. It is often the case that the feeling of family belonging can be different from parent-child relationships (King, *et al.*, 2015). Tomas may have felt a black sheep of the family, but his relationship, although sometimes secret, with his father suggests a bond.

### Positioning of Others: The Cakes

A young boy with leftover birthday cake on his birthday is a particularly sad image. Here is a child who is acutely feels his outsider status within the family unit. However, there is part of a family unit with his Nan and Bamps (grandad) where he feels more comfortable and which develops his identity capital in ways that would support his being a hands-on father with his own children. Unlike his relationship with his father, where kindness and gifts are part of a secret pact, there is a celebration of Tomas' ability to create a better experience for his children. This starts with the cultivation of quiet times in his grandparent's house, times where he would be praised for the person he was, and encouraged. At around 14, Tomas caught an eel in the sea whilst fishing:

I went down the sea and caught a four-foot five-foot silverback eel. Took it home, my mum wouldn't let me in the house with it. So, I took it to my nans and me and my nan, sounds a bit gross, but, gutted it, skinned it and cooked it up and everything and I sat there with my nan and my bamp around the table eating eel, that I'd caught a few hours before. That's one thing I will always remember (laughs)

*J: you say about sitting around this table and eating the eel. Can you remember any more details about that?*

The eel was cooked in butter and mixed herbs. I had mine with chips. My Nan and Bamps had new potatoes and a little bit of veg. An' we just, sat there, around a table, just chit chatting, having food. (lines: 51-57)

Interestingly, his grandparent's house is a quiet place with no shouting. It is peaceful place where Tomas was devoid of any judgement and negative positioning of others (Kraus, 2013). It is the first of many quiet places within the narrative that reflects quiet spaces for Tomas. Culturally, the story is interesting because of the type of food that was eaten: eels in white Welsh culture are traditionally eaten by older people, a dish that would possibly not be appetising to a younger palette, which may reflect the disgust of his mother in bringing it home. A five-foot eel though, is impressive and lacked celebration at his parents' house. This is a turning point in Tomas' story. He goes on to describe the time spent with his grandmother baking cakes:

Making cakes with my Nan. Welsh cakes. What they called... Queen of Tarts... little jam tarts with sponge on top of them. Treacle tarts. Mainly baking with my Nan. But then as I got older it was like, cooking (...) (lines 48-49)

More recently, I still go down to my Nans for cakes and stuff. I made Zac's birthday cake. A couple of years ago, I made my first cake. It was a Transformers cake my Nan helped me do that. I cut out the Transformers thing out of icing, the logo, and laid on the side, and it was a Bumblebee cake black and yellow with a model on top of it. And I made their last cake I made Zac's cake, a joint party. It was a multi coloured four layered cake with chocolate buttons, Maltesers, Minstrels and popping candy in the middle, so when you cut into it, there was all layers with a hole in the middle where there was all sweets. I done a bee, a blue bee for Levi's birthday as well as a couple of other cakes in between. I still go down and cook with my Nan. (lines: 61-66)

As discussed in this thesis, Tomas' agency is considered as constructed in the relational (Gergen, 2009, 2015; Burkitt, 2016), where it relies on the interdependence of others. The ability to be a father in the present day, it seems, came from a quiet and loving relationship with his grandmother and grandfather. This allowed him to have a high level of resources when it came to his own children's birthday celebrations, and developed the ability to show his appreciation and love for his sons in a way that was denied to him as a child. This demonstrates a strong relational bond between him and his grandmother, and the ability to

trust someone (Putnam, 1995), which in turn mediates identity capital. There is the narrative that starts with him as a child without celebration, to a child and young adult who learns from another to cook and enjoy food. Food is a sharing experience, sitting around a table. It is also a quiet experience, a word that is used in the narrative to describe various stages of Tomas' life story with various meanings. This is elaborated in the underlying context of social spaces. I interpret that there is a power in the colours of the cake. A multitude of colours and textures which shows with some clarity the meaning behind the gesture. I am here. I have agency. I make my sons cakes. There are the brightest, most technical cakes that show each child's own identity. It is done with love and pride. It says, here are my resources, because of my relationship with my gran, and in spite of the relationship with my immediate family unit. There is no secret here. There is no hiding away of kindness. I was a black sheep. Now I am a multi-coloured cake maker. An involved father. Here I am. There is also a stability of resource, a continuous flow. Nan is still alive, still cooking with Tomas and the relationship to the present day allows Tomas to flourish.

### Social Spaces: Quiet and Loud

The words quiet and loud run through Tomas' narrative as his way of ascribing meaning to his experiences. He lived in a loud house as a child suggesting a lot of arguments, he enjoyed his time at his grandparents because of the quietness. There are other quiet spaces where Tomas sits for reflection such as the stables, with his cars, with his father whilst waiting for a curry in the curry house. This leads to an interpretation of quietness as a respite, a way of reflecting, and assessing the world around him. Conversely, this happens in his narrative around his thoughts of suicide, sitting on a hill contemplating his role in life and in contrast his loud thinking about the method of suicide by driving fast and not stopping, which is elaborated in a further section. This contrast and play with loud and quiet are used in a reflective way in the narrative. The idea of retreating into spaces of quietness and contemplation is part of the human experience. It is evident in a number of disciplines and environments such as religion (Nash, *et al.*, 2012); adult education (English and Mayo, 2012;

University of the Arts London, 2018); and city design (Benfield, 2013). Quietness, in this sense, is catered for and is accepted as needed for the human condition.

However, in Tomas' narrative, quiet also denotes a negative time in his life where he and Sophie did not communicate their feelings. During this time there was a lot of change. During Sophie's pregnancy with Zac, Tomas became a full-time carer due to her debilitating illness. For Tomas' re-presentation the focus lies in the *quiet six months* (line: 213) where Tomas hides in the garden tinkering with his car and leaving the parenting duties to Sophie. They argued during this time, but he still describes it as quiet, because he failed to communicate his feelings. Although focussed on the philosophy of language, Wittgenstein makes a profound statement that fits within this conundrum. He states that 'what we cannot speak about, we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 89). This does not necessitate being quiet because of a lack of understanding about what is being experienced, but more so that sometimes language is not enough to describe complex experiences. For Tomas, communicating his experiences to Sophie passes over in silence, which led to the quiet six months in his and Sophie's relationship. So much had happened that it was difficult to put into words:

The very quiet six months when Zac was first born. When Zac was born, Sophie [gets upset] when Sophie got pregnant with Zac she was really ill. Like really, really ill. First trimester basically paralysed....basically paralysed come out of hospital in a wheel chair basically learning to walk again, so through pregnancy I was her carer. I looked after her 24/7.... But it got to the point in hospital where I was there 12-14 hours a day anyway. The nurses weren't really doing anything for her. It was me. Um, even down to wiping her arse. It was down to me. Because if she waited and left to push for that. She left in the toilet for nearly an hour despite ringing the bell because everyone is too busy to deal with other people. She couldn't get off the toilet to do anything. I was there 12-14 hours anyway, so they said the best thing was for you to go home. And, sort of recuperate at home. They sent the district nurse out every other day she was coming out. And when Zac was first born, Sophie was back on her feet and there was a big mix up with solicitor's letters going back and forward cos when Zac was first born.... A solicitor's letter went out basically asking for contact to stop for a week or two was the initial what was meant to be, whilst we just got our routine sorted and have the baby at home and everything. That solicitor's letter was written wrong and taken completely out of context and that point [starts tapping on the table] I don't see Cai for nearly two years because of that letter. Um, but another thing that happened was

that when Cai was born my mum had Cai that day cos I was meant to. Um, and had told my ex that Sophie had had the baby and his name is Zac and he weighs this much. She put it all over Facebook, and we hadn't even finished telling family let alone tell any friends yet. And it's plastered-on Facebook for everyone to see. Massive argument between me and my mum. Led to me driving away very erratically leaving two massive black marks up the road and we didn't talk for six months. But then me and Sophie didn't really talk for six months either because I was. I shut down. (lines: 213-236)

What needs to be said is so profound that it is indeed difficult to put into words. The quiet six months shows the difficulty Tomas has in making sense out of his experiences; his partners' illness, pregnancy, loss, caring responsibility, new baby, and family arguments. Quietness reflects the inability to put into words this change, and the loss of communication with a person that he loved and trusted. This *shut down* (line: 236) is discussed in more detail below but offers a glimpse of how a multitude of complex life experiences can lead to the inability to communicate in close relationships even when those experiences are shared.

### Self- Positioning: Cars

Tomas positions himself in the narrative around his focus on cars. This forms an interesting narrative within its own right. Cars are a passion for Tomas. It seems from his story that his father and grandfather also have this passion, and it is around cars that the males in the narrative congregate and communicate. Tomas describes how he was a mechanic at 20 years old, and to this day, does odd jobs for friends and family. He gained this resource from his dad and grandad and remembered incidents in his life where there were connections with both his father and grandfather:

**LOADS!** ((laughs)) getting stuck in the mud when he went to pick up a car before, towing it back with my dad. It had been literally used as a chicken shed in the middle of a field. The deal was he could have it for nothing if he went and got it, it was literally in the middle of a field, and I fell out of my wellies, I was covered in mud, and the back of my dad's car completely covered in mud,

towing this old Morris Minor, from it was out in Brecon somewhere, and it was, it was full of shit! It was being used as a chicken coop. I still remember what that car ended up like once it was finished. It was a show winning, immaculate, Morris Minor Traveller. I helped him do it. (lines: 68-73)

I remember pressure washing. I was about 8 or 9. Pressure washing with him, scrubbing, quite literally chicken shit off the insides, and all of the outsides, sanding it down. I couldn't be there when he was welding it. But I remember sitting there my gramps garages has got a door into it and has a tiny little window right at the top so if you are walking down from the garden you see your feet cos you go down a couple of steps to the door. Sitting by there and watching the bits I wasn't allowed to do. But, yeah, I helped him change engines, rebuild cars. But whereas like, before, he was teaching me, now, like, cos he's 80-81, quite bad arthritis now in his hands because he can't do it, but his daily driver, his only car is a 1954 Morris Minor. And he still uses it every day, takes my Nan to the hospital in it and so now the maintenance of it is fallen down to me. So, I have a phone call to say, "Can you come and look at this for me?" "Can you change this for me?" and...

*J: do you remember a particular incident?*

It's only been the last couple of years where he's asked me for help rather than me say, can I do this. The first time was about three or four years ago when the diff was whining on his last convertible. And, I go down and change it for him. I just remember so much about working on those cars. He's rebuilt so many of them over the years.

*J: yeah? Can you remember a particular one?*

**YEAH!**

*J: tell me more...*

Old English red original convertible white top and black leather interior and we actually had it as our wedding car. He had two at the time, we had that, and we had a white four doors. Four doors. Had the old English white convertible and his friend had an old English white convertible but his was a converted one. Which was my Bamps was an original out of the factory. The three cars were our wedding cars. (lines: 75-93)

This is an animated experience which showed the fun his dad, grandad and himself had at a time where he picked up a car from a field and refurbished it. Then, a slowing down, an observation of the garage in his grandfather's garden, watching as he made a dilapidated car into a prize-winning beauty. His ability to work on cars follows him throughout the narrative and offers glimpses into times of happiness and sadness. Below, there two parts of a car

narrative. One is a celebration of Tomas and Sophie's wedding day and shows the coming together of family and friends around the cars. A symbol of beauty and life; of happiness and hope. Interestingly here, it shows how stories often do not come in chronological order; Tomas starts with describing Sophie being hungover the morning after the wedding and then goes back to the day itself.

The other, a more personal retrospection, shows the deteriorating relationships with people closest to Tomas. He starts losing access to his relationship with Cai, his firstborn. Tomas' loss of contact with him reflected his loss of control in mending and tending to cars. He starts working in a garage, then when the traumatic situation of Cai's contact starts to happen, his relationship with cars changes. It becomes destructive, damaging his own vehicle in frustration. There is also a time of pressure within Cai's step-father's car where he is filmed removing Cai out of the car seat. He loses his power for fixing and creating beauty, the driving in the night thinking about ending his life, partly because of the situation of losing contact with Cai. Then there is the disconnection to Sophie, where he works in his car outside of the house, ignoring the needs of his new family:

### **The wedding:**

Umm had a night in the Premier Inn. Got up for breakfast, Sophie was so rough she wouldn't come down with me, so I went for breakfast on my own and then back to the mad house then, because my house was full of Sophie's family who had come down from up Yorkshire and Devon and everything, so it was back to the madhouse again. It was good then. Obviously, my dad driving me and my best man in the red Morris and my granddad took Sophie, and her dad in his one and all the bridesmaids went in the other one then. It was quite a cool sight. It's one of my favourite pictures is, there's me and Sophie, and then there's Dave stood in front of his one, my dad stood in front of the blue one and Bamps in front of his one. That was actually in the MH ((local paper)) in the motoring section ((laughs really loudly)). (lines: 108-114)

### **The loss of contact with Cai**

My mum's got Cai during the day whilst I'm in work. She, basically, let her [Cai's mother] take him to the park and he never came home. (lines 139-140)

I've been arrested for criminal damage. That's a funny one though cos I did actually do it (laughs) I damaged a car and they come and put handcuffs on

me put me in the back of the police car and I said do you want a receipt for the car because that car is mine he said what? That's my car. You've damaged your own car. Handcuffs off it was done and dusted. Um, that was all to do with not being able to see him over Christmas (lines: 146-149).

The step father dropped him off and was filming me without my permission, um from his phone on the dashboard. My son knew it was there cos we had since seen the video through solicitors and everything, and he smiles for the camera before we turn up. Um, the only raised voice you hear is his step dad, and I'm being punched and kicked by my own son, and not lightly. I came out with a bruise on my ribs where he kicked and punched in the face trying to undo his seat belt. I was told I was well within my right to remove him from the car and take him. Um, but I didn't force him, I tried and undone his seatbelt and he put up a fight and I'm not putting him through that. Then I had a phone call from the police advising me not to attend to pick up my son as there was an investigation underway as I was accused of assault on a minor. As you can imagine for me at that time it was fricking heart-breaking, um cos we had Zac at that point and instantly the worst-case scenarios start running through the head. What did I do? Did I do something wrong? Um, Social Services are going to be involved now. What's going to happen? Are they gonna think there is something wrong and will come and check us and come check Zac? Turns out the video, the allegations they made, I knew deep down I hadn't done anything wrong. I'd been advised I'd done everything. It's always still there. Did I raise my voice? Did I raise my hand too quick? Did I push it out of the way when he was hitting me? The video shows me being perfectly calm being punched and kicked and then walking away and the only shouting was the step dad shouting abuse at me as I left (lines: 153-166).

### **Suicidal thoughts**

Um, a couple of times, stood at the top of Pendu Point thinking. I've disappeared in the middle of the night for a drive, and I've walked in the dark to the very top of Pendu point and thought just about walking straight off the end. Things would be better for everyone if I wasn't there. I wouldn't be causing emotional harm to Cai. I wouldn't be putting Zac though it. I wouldn't be making Sophie feel like shit. Um, driving down Queen Road towards the big roundabout thinking you know driving at 70,80,90 mile an hour and just thinking about not steering, not breaking, just foot down straight through the roundabout. A couple of times. But I haven't had one of them for quite a while now (laughs) (lines: 193-198)



## Absent dad hiding

I know the early stages of Zac, I was, I'm not gonna say I was a shit dad, but I was an absent dad. I wasn't there emotionally or physically half the time, cos I was shut down and used to hide and I accept that. I say to Sophie, you know, I'm sorry I was a dick back then. I didn't talk about it. I didn't... Cos she didn't know what was going on in my head, so it was difficult for her at the time as well cos she felt like a single mum even though I was there. Hhm. But yeah. (lines: 187-190)

My cars have been, were, a big issue between me and Sophie. I used to spend too much time and too much money on them as an escape. When I was working on my cars I was in my own little world. I wasn't thinking of anything else. Cos at that point if I was thinking about other things I'd end up getting down and then, then feeling suicidal so I used to, my way of coping was, I refer to it as hiding, cos I wasn't in the house, I wasn't helping to do dishes, I wasn't looking after Zac. If I didn't have anything to physically fix or modify on my car I would wash it and polish it and I dunno how half my car as any paint on it at one point regardless of the weather. Looking back, I should have spoken to Sophie more and, but, you can't change the past you got to just, make better for the future. (lines: 202-208)

The car narrative re-presents the gradual withdrawal from the relationships that Tomas holds dear. This starts with the decline in the ability to father Cai in a way that Tomas wanted. Being involved in a child's life in the present day shapes the way fatherhood is constructed (Kotila and Kamp Dush, 2013 ; Coltrane, 1996). Without this level of involvement, Tomas is left without a sense of identity as a father. It is stated that men present 'moral tales' about themselves as fathers (Ribbens McCarthy, *et al.*, 2003), especially if they are separated to show how 'good' they are at fathering. These narratives are constructed when talking about contact with their child with a sense of duty and responsibility. Lamb, *et al.* (1987) posited three distinct components of father involvement: the availability of access to their children, engagement with them, and the responsibility of managing their children's lives. These oral tales also have gender stereotype implications. For a father, being a provider for a family, and being supportive of their children is a priority (Welford and Powel, 2014). Identity as a father seems to rely on the ability to meet these expectations, something which is not available to Tomas.

As a separated father in these circumstances, Tomas could, in fact, choose to walk away, but he does not (Georgia, 2014; Backett, 1982). 'Staying' and working for contact was a moral act that was a choice for Tomas (Georgia, 2014). However, his inability to do this caused him pain and went against his moral ideals. This manifests itself in him thinking about committing suicide, having high-risk behaviours such as driving his car very fast. Going through difficult times should not mean that a person does not want to live (Samaritans, 2017). However, thoughts and actions are exacerbated by a complex array of factors in a person's life. Fathers who are non-resident with their children have a higher incidence of depressive illness (Anderson, Kohler, and Letiecq, 2005), which also links to a higher risk of suicide. Suicide is three times more likely in males. Wales, behind Scotland, has the second-highest rate in male suicide in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2016a; see also Luca, 2016). The risk is said to increase in areas of disadvantage where people who may experience multiple negative life events feel powerless to resolve them (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2008; Lorant *et al.*, 2005), and where agency is hindered, as people have fewer choices and feel trapped and defeated (Redley, 2003; Kidd, 2004).

I envisage the term *absent dad* as something that bothers Tomas. This term is used to describe his relationship with Zac but also reflects his status with Cai. The term 'absent fathers' is interesting as it has been used throughout the past two decades in the media and politics to explain the plethora of societal problems (Parke and Brott, 1999). This includes the breakdown in society (Jones, 2007) rise of crime (Hall, 2001), child poverty (UNICEF, 1996), addiction, depression in children, and loss of a country's productivity (Smith, 2010). Tomas would have been aware of this from the media and actions of the government. The core of media and policy responses to absent fathers by the government plays on absent fathers being pariahs. For example, David Cameron stated that the UK needs to be 'genuinely hostile' towards absent fathers. With a 'full force of shame' heaped towards them (Cameron, 2011, online). Government policy focuses on supporting marriage (The Centre for Social Justice, 2017; Smith, 2010), and the government's attempt at making absent fathers financially responsible for their children has all but failed in the UK with the collapse Child Support Agency/ Child Maintenance Service (Barnes, 2018). This shows in a specific context how grand narratives and political moral ideologies are irrelevant to some people but are also highly unobtainable and out of reach. The problem then lies in the effects such messages

have when they are received by people that cannot fit into the societal structure that is required of them. Tomas using the term, may indicate that he is aware that he did not fit into this structure himself.

Tomas still feels absent even though he has a stable relationship with Sophie which results in marriage. Although his relationship is generally a positive one, Tomas still recognises his absence from both Sophie and Zac. This is not generally a physical absence. In fact, Tomas talks about caring for Sophie due to an illness during and after the birth of Zac. He recognises that he *hides* and *escapes* from his thoughts and from his family. He becomes more absent in his relationships with people who love him the most. In one study, it was recognised that when fathers felt stressed or underequipped to deal with being supportive of their children, they recognised this was due to a lack of resources (Palkovitz, 2016). These fathering resources have been studied and link a framework of relationships, context, and social address. These include a relationship with the birth mother, age, socioeconomic status, residential status, personality, coping style, and relationship history with own parents plus a myriad of other dimensions. Fathering resource entails:

any personal attribute, interpersonal dynamic, or contextual circumstance that implicitly or explicitly affects a father's level of involvement, father-child relationship quality or a fathers' overall lived experience

(Palkovitz and Hull, 2018, p. 185).

This shines a spotlight on the possible reasons for a fathers' strengths or barriers to father the way they would like to. It works alongside the description of identity capital of fathers in which men navigate their life experiences *because of* and *in spite of* the resources available to them. However, this description does not specifically identify the *in spite of* the scenario of the description of identity capital related to this study. There is an especially noticeable absence of the definition of macro-level constructions of society. This can be problematic, apart from the use of the term 'contextual', which can have a variety of connotations, which researchers seem to enjoy using to encompass a broad range of scenarios.

It is worth noting here that I found the section on absent fathers extremely enlightening. It was difficult for me to interpret Tomas' experience due to my not having any awareness of the effects on absent fathers. As a child and experiencing a family structure breakdown, this is something that I had not thought about thought. As a single parent I had often wondered how the absent father might have felt. I felt that the story of my own life was devoid of fathers with emotional responses to the loss of firstly me, and then my child. I toyed with the idea that my strong character and feminist viewpoints may have masked the feelings of the men around me; even if they were sometimes negative forces in my life. I acknowledged that I had been surrounded by strong female characters and few male role models. This was for me, the reader, the researcher, a daughter, a mother of a son, a kind of revelation. Tomas told the story that is not heard. Even if there is no relationship with the mother and sporadic relationship with a child, this seems to have a profound effect on a father's past, present, and future experiences. Cai was not taken away by a social worker; he was not deceased. He had been born Tomas' son and remained so without contact, and this has left a lasting impression.

### *The Because Of*

It is worth considering the issues of Tomas' identity capital depletion within the story, and how this happens. The loss of Cai is so significant that it takes up most of the interview. In this section there is an exploration of the themes that highlight where identity capital was lost. It considers domestic abuse, the betrayal by his own mother, and the trauma of contact through the court system.

### *Domestic abuse*

This study uses the term domestic abuse. It is hoped that this encourages a reader to consider abuse not just as a physical action, but as financial, sexual, and emotional control

(Donovan and Hester, 2010). However, there is an element of physical violence in Tomas' narrative, and this needs to be recognised. It would be possible for Tomas' experiences as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), a gender-neutral term that includes assault and violence towards an intimate partner (Burzawa and Burzawa, 2003; Hogan, 2016). However, this is not the case in Tomas' experience, as the abuse and violence occurred during and post his relationship with Cai's mother. Although the *domestic* element of the term domestic abuse is questionable, it does not infer that there is an intimacy or a partnership with the perpetrator at the time of the abuse. Tomas tells of the time when Cai was 10 months old and he flees the house with Cai, away from his then-girlfriend, who was abusive towards him. They had been living together after moving away from his parents, and this is when, in Tomas' words, *the shit hit the fan*. I ask him if he remembers the time in any detail:

I put my head through the, the back of my head through the kitchen to the bathroom door cos I was sat on the bathroom floor. Um, pretty much having a breakdown and she was sat on the end of the bed, in full ear shot talking to my eldest going "your daddy doesn't love you" and all this and I was sat there banging my head against the door until my head went through it. Then I was pretty much not far off self-destruct mode then. Not the best times. This is why I left not long after that. Literally days after it. But she used to try and lock me in the house, so I couldn't go anywhere. Um, at points when I was working, she'd middle of the day driving past checking on me, my phone wouldn't stop ringing and one of the boys would say, I'm sure your missus just went past in the car and checking up I was actually there (lines: 200-206)

Um. Bits of it. More when I left rather than the build up to it, because I've tried to block it out more than everything. I dunno whether I tried to block it out or whether because of my state of mind at the time I just don't remember much of it. She'd locked me in, so one time I jumped out of the window. A few times I ended up with ripped clothes where she had grabbed me to try and stop me walking out of the door. Um, and then, the one final argument where um, luckily... I don't know what would have happened if I didn't have the dog at the time. I used to have a German Shepherd um, called Shep. She didn't really like her much. She was definitely my dog and during an argument she grabbed a knife, um, and the dog faced her into a corner and that point then, I left and took Cai with me. And that was the final moment if you like. And that was uhh yeah, I took him with me and we left. (lines: 208-225)

I found this section difficult. It took weeks of thought as to why my re-presentation of this narrative was very descriptive, concentrating only on a generalised literature review of domestic abuse without the inclusion of my own voice. The answer is I feel twofold: my own personal experiences of domestic abuse were not female on male violence, and my own teaching and experience of facilitating domestic abuse groups supported this experience.

I could not relate to Tomas here. If I am honest, I was unsure that I wanted to. The narrative was upsetting to hear, to transcribe, and to read. It created a kind of cognitive dissonance with regard to my own personal life experiences where male-on-female violence was prevalent. I scanned the piece of narrative for reasons why Tomas' ex-partner may have been violent. I scanned and found the section on Tomas butting his head against the wall. Yes, I thought there was aggression here too. So much so that his head went through the back of the kitchen door. Where was the baby? I thought. Now my child protection experience kicked in. This is not right, I thought. He must have exacerbated this situation by butting his head through the door, and this is what provoked the situation.

My first response to the narrative was backed up by my life experience. As a facilitator of domestic abuse survivor groups, there was always an underlying assumption about why women were violent in intimate relationships. Training in the early 2010s taught me that it was likely that men were violent towards women to maintain a hierarchical structure of patriarchal control, and women were violent because of male provocation (Saunders, 1988). This viewpoint was established by feminists, arguably, radical feminist viewpoints of domestic violence (Hoyle, 2011). It is statistically evident there is a disproportionate amount of violence aimed towards women by men; an estimated 15% of men compared to 28% of women in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2017b). On the most severe end of the spectrum, two women a week are killed by men in the UK by a current or former partner (Office for National Statistics, 2016b), 104 per year on average. This is compared to 28 men who were killed by their partner or ex-partner in 2015/16 (Office for National Statistics, 2016c). However, a feminist model for viewing men as perpetrators and women as victims could be seen as reinforcing gender stereotypes (Dempsey, 2013). Whilst studies argue that there are differing types, frequency, and severity of abuse in male-female and female-male abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2017c; Perryman and Appleton, 2016;

Dobash and Dobash, 2004), research into female perpetrators could be seen as still a taboo and therefore under-researched (Goodey, 2005; Daubney, 2016). Davies (2018) argues there is a societal denial that women have the capacity towards abuse, where there is a reluctance to understand its complexities other than from a traditional focus on women and children as victims (Hogan, 2016; Chaudhuri, 2012). Correspondingly, there is a tendency for males to not report incidents. Men were less likely to tell someone in an official capacity about abuse (23% compared to 43%), which included the police (10% male, 26% female). They were also less likely to tell someone they knew personally (55% male to 80% female). This may be due to a societal, attitudinal, and formal barriers for male victims (Perryman and Appleton, 2016) where men feel there is gender stereotyping. This minimises the likelihood of men seeking help as they feel embarrassed and not visible in society (McCarrick, 2015).

I found it extremely hard to take my own prejudices out of the context that Tomas' was describing. Taken in context, it explains why he could not stay, why it was unsafe, and why he left with Cai in his arms. There was no mention of police charges or of social services intervention. He went to the only place that he knew, his parents' home, where he stayed for a while. There is a difficulty for men to find somewhere safe to stay after such incidents. There are financial cuts across all domestic abuse support services (Grierson, 2018), but in Wales, the support for men can be seen as inadequate, with only one male refuge in North Wales and a current consultation under review for another male refuge in Bridgend. It is unclear if there would be provisions for children to stay with their male carers in the new building. Sometimes, problems are not solved in a family structure. A person's needs, are often not met by those who are supposedly closest to them (see Keay's (1987) interview with Margaret Thatcher for a counterargument).

### The betrayal

Turns out after a couple of days I went back to work, my mum had been letting her come and see Cai after her words were um, "don't bring him anywhere near me ((Cai))! I'll leave him here I'll leave him in the middle of the road!" But her words to me about Cai, um, to then, after a week a week and a half, still waiting to get paid the end of the month. My mum's got Cai during the day whilst I'm in work. She, basically my mum let her take him to the park

and he never came home but I phoned the police they said well it's his mother, we can't, have you go to any court order to say he resides with you? Well no, well we can't do anything. I tried to get access sorted between us, but it was very sporadic and as and when it suited her. (lines: 136-142)

This may explain why Tomas told me twice about being closer to his father than his mother. This betrayal of trust would cost Tomas his son and his opportunity to be a present father. This section also shows how difficult it was for Tomas to care for Cai himself without a childminder and support. However, it could be that he had already considered that he got on better with his father than his mother at this point, and it is interesting that he entrusts her with the most precious thing in his life; Cai. This is a puzzle that can be solved by considering the context of the situation. Possibly, Tomas had nowhere else to go; there are no refuges, and his family lives in the street close to his house. Tomas himself is only 20-21 years old, a now young single dad and victim of domestic abuse. Tomas' agency is mediated by his relationships with others and the decisions that he has available at the time. Although his mother is not a present figure in his life as much as he may like, he still turns to her during a time of crisis. This links to capital theory whereby links to others are called upon in a crisis and used to provide resources and gain in a persons' life (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). This type of social capital relies on trust, solidarity, community bonds (Riesman, et al., 1950; Bellah, et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000). However, relational trust can have negative social capital consequences (Portes, 2014), as is seen in the section of the narrative. It is worth remembering that the emphasis in this study is on relational agency. It is not individuals that provide us with agentic or identity capital means, but the result of an interdependence within the relationships (Burkitt, 2016). If the only people you can rely on effectively block reciprocity, and lead to distrust (such as in Tomas' gift giving narrative), then this effectively blocks any ability to gain identity capital.

#### Six years of court to try and get access

Um, six years of court to try and get access to him, constantly up and down with mental health. And ended up with nothing. I don't even get to write to him, well, I can write to him but that's about it (lines: 14-15)



Tomas went through the court system for access to contact with Cai, which was sporadic and emotionally charged. Tomas states Cai's mother would encourage Cai to be naughty and would regularly change the plans. This, too, was a traumatic experience that decreased his identity capital. He was concerned with the effect on Zac as well as the emotional difficulties with Cai. He made a conscious decision to let go of contact with Cai. A painful decision for Tomas. However, it is debatable whether this showed agency or lack of agency. Tomas had made the decision whilst being supported by Sophie and his new family, making a choice to end contact because of the harm to Cai and Zac. However, his relationship with Cai's mother and the court system itself led Tomas to have a lack of agency in actualising his identity as Cai's father.

It is worth noting the cultural and historical elements of this issue. Even though there is evidence of a lack of gender bias in the court system, since 2012, there have been legal aid cuts which mean attending court with legal advice is now a costly process, unless a parent is willing to make allegations of domestic abuse to a doctor or professional worker (Harding and Newnham, 2015). The most up to date information on the subject focus on the trauma of women having to go through the court system rather than fathers (All Party Parliamentary Group of Domestic Violence, 2016), which suggests that the detail of trauma and parental alienation for fathers is somewhat overlooked (Lorandos *et al.* 2013). Child alienation by one parent is a contentious subject. It is said to be a way in which one parent brainwashes the child to vilify and target the other parent (Gardner, 1998). Traditionally, children live with their mothers. Therefore there are more cases involving women as perpetrators. However, and it is worth noting that any parent can alienate a child (Noon, 2018).

### *The In Spite Of*

#### *Deliberately trying to make family time*

This section focusses on how time changes and how identity capital is used to create resources that allow Tomas to be the father that he wants to be. It can be argued that with

life experience, Tomas develops an ability to change the way he reacts to his interdependence with people. Tomas decided to make a conscious effort with Sophie, Zac, and Levi. The deep emotions and relational ties mediate Tomas' decision making (Burkitt, 2016), and allow him to be part of a social construction of his own making; his family. Identity capital comes from power in agency through interdependence with others. The family have bought a horse, which Tomas tends to every day, they have many (*too many*) animals. Tomas becomes part of a menagerie of animals and people with whom he chooses to surround himself. There tends to be an ongoing need to acquire more animals, or possibly adopt a child. Tomas is surrounded and present.

I dunno we've I'd say since Zac has been a couple of years old, 2-3 years old things have sort of got better. And this is more deliberately trying to make family time, whereas before it wasn't. So, it's like, silly things, like quite often we'd go to Blythe park, go to the shop, birdseed, cup of tea, and a pasty and go sit on the bench and feed the birds cup of tea and Levi is quite happy feeding the birds and running around. We haven't done it so much recently but through the summer we were doing that. The little things I hope they sort of remember and I try and get as much camping in as possible. (lines: 251-255)

... Beginning of last summer, we went wild camping. And it is literally as it is. It's a field. On the edge of the field there is a woodland and we camped in the woodland and everything. We went for four nights. We got there quite late on the Friday and we literally just set up and we got, it didn't just get dark it got black cos there is nothing there. Um, the next day we got there set up, we had two dogs with us. Um, so established camp a bit more. Made a massive den and it was way, way too big., We were moving trees literally like 6-8 inches across that are dead on the floor to try and get up on the tree. Yeah, we made a massive den. Um we went collecting stones and rocks and bricks to make a fire pit. A massive open fire and cook on a barbeque. Levi found a hedgehog ((laughs). He shit himself! 'Cos it was, there were other people there, but we had gone the furthest place we could go in the woods, so it was quiet. When we first go there were about three or four tents up the top end, so we wanted to get away from them, so it was quieter, and we were sat there making breakfast one morning. We heard Levi scream, ran out of the tent and he was just stood there screaming pointing looking at a rock, that was a hedgehog and realised he went to move it and realised it was an animal

*J: yeah?*

So, we nicknamed him Spiky Bob (laughs). Yeah it was just being outdoors. We went for quite a few walks once we were there and it was the boys absolutely loved it. Being outside, getting dirty and muddy, and climbing trees and just fun outdoor stuff. (lines: 257-290)

This, and his narrative surrounding his grandparents show how identity capital is mediated in a positive way. Here, Tomas implies that he made a choice to create time for his family. This leads to a happier time for Tomas where he reaps the rewards of being part of an interdependent unit. Interestingly, this narrative is in contrast with the *because of* narratives, where agency and identity capital is compromised. Apart from some peaceful time alone, he is not using space for separation and hiding. There is an absence of inner conversations in this narrative which is replaced by coordinated action and interdependency with his family; which in turn describes relational agency (Burkitt, 2016).

Also, there is an interesting observation in terms of how the social space, quiet and loud, seems to have reversed. Tomas still likes his quiet places. These include places where he can reflect and think, the stables, which is a place unlike the end of a cliff face or driving along a road wanting to crash. However, I envisage Tomas having a loud household. Throughout his narrative, he talks about peace and quiet as something he likes, but he now surrounds himself with people and animals. This is a positive loudness, of his a making. Tomas has chosen his loud family unit. This loudness is created through choice, and it is happy. This study interprets the narratives in line with the identity capital needed for the fathers to be the person *they* want to be. Agentic forces mediate such identities, but identity belongs to the fathers and is not the possession of others.

## *Rob's Lived Life*

Rob is 32 and is a single parent living alone with his youngest daughter, Nia, who is six. Rob describes himself as a white, heterosexual man. He states he has no qualifications and does not work at present because he looks after his home and child. Rob gained custody of Nia three years ago after he found that she was going to be put into care because her mother was a drug user and was not able to care for her. He had just started a drug recovery program himself at the time and worked hard to ensure he could be the best father for Nia.

As a child, Rob lived at home with his mother and sister. His father was on long term sickness benefits, left the family home, and saw him every week as a child where they went to the same café each time and also to a relative's house to meet his cousins. His mother worked full time in the care sector, and they had a house that was mortgaged. Rob remembers not having her at home a lot, and at the time, he blamed her for his problems. He became disruptive in school and a non-attender. He and his mother had arguments over not attending school, and once she threw a bowl of water over him to try and force him to get up and go to school. His mother now has terminal cancer.

Rob states he was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at 12 years old. His mother didn't want him to have tablets because she thought she had been through the worst with him. Rob started taking Valium recreationally around 13 years old. He also started buying cars, tinkering with the mechanics with his friends, and driving them around for long periods without being caught by the police. He was still going to school around 14 years old but only for lunch and if science was on that day. He liked science. He remembers around this time that there was a solar eclipse, and this was one of his most treasured memories. He also remembers stealing the Magnesium from the chemistry room in the school, and he went with his friends to a lake and put it in the water, causing explosions. He found this amusing at the time.

At 15, Rob was homeless for a while as he argued with his mother. Rob states he used to trash the house he shared with her and his sister on times. She is credited with trying to get him to go to school, but he was difficult to control. He sofa surfed and slept on the streets. Homeless people and sex workers helped him. He was just short of 16 and then was able to

go to the homeless project for accommodation purposes. This is where he met his first love, Sarah. Rob was 17 when Sarah gave birth to his son, Jay. They moved in to a council house together. They started to argue, and after one night she told him not to come back when he went out, and when he did, they split up. Rob regrets this as he still thinks they could have worked out. Her new partner, who she is still with, raised his son and he states he respects him for this.

Rob states that he took drugs for around ten years and became dependant on heroin for around three years and also went to prison for a short while for assaulting a man. During this time, he was contacted by Social Services to tell him that he had a child that was being put up for adoption. His middle child from another partner was put into care and adopted because her mother was a heavy drug user. Rob did not know about the child going into care until the final stages of adoption. Rob admits that he also had drug issues at the time. Rob states he was in a chaotic place and could not look after himself, let alone a child. Because of his experiences in losing a child to the care system, Rob states that he did not hesitate to fight for custody of his third child Nia when her mother was on drugs. Working with Social Services was difficult for Rob, as he felt they treated him differently to others in the system. He felt ostracised from other parents and the workers at times. At present, Rob has not had contact with Social Services for three years and is drug-free. He attends Dad's group and has done so for a few years. He sees his father, mother, and sister regularly and enjoys his time raising Nia. His mother now has terminal cancer.

### *The Told Story*

I met Rob in an established Dad's group. Rob challenged me in the first meeting to the point of the study. He stated that he understood what 'areas of disadvantage were' and questioned the point of the study (see the previous chapter). Rob wore a baseball cap and it was sometimes pulled down low. He sat to the left of me and tapped his leg as I spoke to everyone. He was an attractive man, taller than me with a commanding presence. I did not feel intimidated by Rob. My first impressions of him were that he was an intelligent man. I

felt a little challenged when he asked me questions about the study, which soon became a quasi-political debate in the group. As stated in the previous chapter, I was surprised that he wanted to meet.

We met in the same place but a month later, where we sat down, and I brought some refreshments. Rob was gentler in attitude then, a little nervous as can be natural during these meetings. Unlike Tomas and Adam, Rob did not reveal any of his stories prior to our meeting. Rob also did not like silence. He liked to fill in thinking time gaps left after questions by me with words. The meeting lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes. Rob starts sub-session 1, by explaining his relationships with his children. This is not a *once upon a time* start to a story, but maybe considered a quick explanation of his present situation. It is worth noting that I had no background knowledge of Rob's life story before-hand. Yet, he chose to tell me about his childhood in the initial opening of his narrative. It seems that Mary Catherine Bateson was correct in her assertion that as a culture, we respond to stories where the end is contained in the beginning of a narrative (Bateson, 2010). In a finer detailed point, it can also be suggested that there is always a specific point in the start of the narrative that is a kind of *punch line*, a way of signalling to the listener what is about to come in the story:

I'm fine it's just that it's strange to me, like. Never really been in this environment that's what it is. Out of my comfort zone yeah! ((J: light laugh)). I done tha'. I see my other boy and my other daughter was taken into care. That's why I fought so hard for this one like. I couldn't have the same thing happening. Um, can you give me like, a question or 'summat?

*J: No, it's just like where you want to start is where you want to start...*

I dunno, see, there's a lot of rough shit in there. When like I was homeless when I was 15, argued with my mother she told me to leave so I just did. Obviously went down the wrong path in hostels and stuff. Ended up in jail. In trouble a lot. Fighting whatever, childish things really when I look back. Um, yeah, so that was like kind'a shitty like going through that crap. Then my son was born when I was seventeen. That was a major shock to the system. I had to grow up really quick, like. I ended up floating round wherever, sofa surfing, just doing stupid shit like that. Most of the shit before that was like sort of very hectic and very chaotic lifestyle for a while. I actually decided to fight for my daughter and decided things had to change then. I said like, I was going

into that just now cos I think the most important thing of all my life now is my kid, my daughter like doing that 'en it. Before that, if I look back there was a lot of chaotic childish behaviours like. And now, I've grown up a bit. I think I have anyway, personally. (lines: 3-27)

It seemed that the period after each child was born created different life experiences for Rob. Each, as will be examined, provided clear *shocks to the system* for Rob, and at many times, as in Tomas' narrative, Rob recognises that his inability to be equipped to deal with being a father at certain points was due to a lack of resources (Palkovitz, 2016). But, as is seen further in the analysis, fatherhood, when fully supported by other relationships, can be a personal developmental resource (Palkovitz, 2016) for Rob. Through his relationship with Nia, he does the things that he pushed against as a child and young adult. He collaborates with Nia's school, learns, plays. Rob decides to change, and the relationships around him also change. However, in his story, there is a sense of regret, especially towards his mother and his first love, Sarah.

#### Self-Positioning: 'Digging my heels in' and other 'childish behaviours'

Until becoming a full-time father for Nia, Rob positioned himself in opposition to many of the relational elements in his life. The narrative account given by Rob highlights him being *stubborn* (lines 96, 293, 274, 607). Being stubborn has various outcomes for his identity capital in his story. Rob narrates how at certain points in his life, he has *dug his heels in* (lines: 534,601,607,608,609), to create both individual and social gains, which lead to varying degrees of success. On a positive note, he describes himself as digging his heels in to signify his stubbornness in getting a job done, like working with Social Services, or giving up smoking:

Like smoking like, I dig my heels in, and it's done. I'll finish with that now, like. I won't go back. That's the best when I dig my heels in, like. (lines: 608-609)

He also uses the metaphor to talk about the decisions he makes and will not be moved from, like not going back to his mother's, making himself homeless, and not going to school. This metaphor relates more to the life choices he makes rather than the decisions others make for him. For instance, when I first considered *to dig my heels in*, it conjured up an image of a horse trying to be pulled forward on a guide rope by a person who looks after it, but the horse chooses to remain firm, setting its own path. The metaphor suggests an internal choice, an agency that he himself controlled and created. Rob seems to resist some of the choices others make for him. However, if not an act of resistance, it is, as discussed, an act of choice. This is worth considering, as this section features some further narrative on the subject.

Rob demonstrates in these sections that he is doing what he wanted and going where he wanted. He attributes this to stubbornness. As a mother, hearing the words 'we are done' from a child may have been extremely painful, and there is an element in his story of regret about the relationship with his mother during this time, all of which is influenced by her now having terminal cancer. These acts of choice or resistance reminded me of my first attempt at defining what identity capital was in the pilot study, whereby I had toyed with Bateson's (1973) observations of a Balinese tightrope walker performance, walking along a rope which signified a life path. They used the rod as a way of balancing themselves through turbulent times and this signified to me a way of describing identity capital resources. (see Chapter 3 figure XYZ). An interesting observation by Bateson in his later work (Bateson, 1987), signified how in Balinese culture, the world was seen as dangerous and was entrenched in sets of moral and cultural values of social rules and regulations and how this acrobatic performance signified the enjoyment of fear. Rob's choices went against his own culture's social rules, and there was also a thrill in fear of choosing his own path; 'The acrobat's enjoyment both of the thrill and of his [*sic*] own virtuosity in avoiding disaster' (Bateson, 1972, p.181):

Yeah stupid things like, childish. On Valium's, stabbed a policeman in the leg with a screwdriver and stupid things. Childish things. Really childish looking back, like. If I killed someone could I really live with that? I don't think that I could like, just the way I was acting back then it was like I could like. It's uh. As I said I was only a kid thirteen - fourteen. It was all this youth offending things and stuff. I have only been in trouble with the police a few times as an adult



literally most of it has been stupid things, like. Being arrested with a ten-pound deal. Stupid things, like. (lines: 469-473)

Driving cars, in school as well digging my heels in, and mum and stuff. There's a lot of times. My ex missus. My son's mother. The way we split up. There's probably a lot I could go in to. All of that probably could come under that heading of childish behaviour. Half the stuff I got in trouble with in the Youth Offending Team is probably to do with being childish. Getting left to my own devices. I could do what I want, like, and gone then. Let's go burn something down or do this or, stupid things, like. (lines: 601-605)

This is why I believe making Rob's own choices was so important for him. His personal resources were so important for his survival. His ability to keep hold of this rod, controlling his balance, even if his rope, his life journey, is shaky. There is no safety net beneath him or people to help him, and this may possibly provide the thrill that is needed. Even if some of his decisions are plain dangerous and scary, he still maintains control of his resources. In the second section above, notice how he directs me to his own heading: *All of that probably could come under that heading of childish behaviour*. Rob still holds on to his rod at all times, even in the interview.

It is worth considering my difficulty in understanding how Rob's individualism could ever be seen in the light of the study's theoretical positioning as relational. Rob talked a lot about his actions being his own decisions and his description of *self* as an internal structure. These ideas reflect how it is common to explain the world and the human condition by relying on answers related to scientific studies of the *self* in psychology (Gergen, 2009). However, his actions and choices can also be seen as in confluence (Gergen, 2009; Shotter, 2012) with the people and the world around him. Rather than decontextualize the word *childish* or look for attributes of an internal self to understand the reasoning behind the word, being *childish* in this sense allows insight into how people within Rob's society may class childlike behaviour. The word *childish* may have many types of linguistic meanings, but it cannot be separated from the relationships that surround Rob's narrative. By considering the relational aspect of social constructionism, these words and actions in Rob's narrative are interpreted by the intended meaning of the people that say them (Shotter, 2012). Being childish might be

inextricably linked to matters of 'local convention' (Gergen, 1994, p. 73), a way of understanding words and actions in relation to the social and historical context they are described. This also led to a theoretical challenge. In the narrative, his actions and behaviours do not stand alone and are not owned internally by him, but are in union with the surrounding 'entities'. Gergen states, these 'entities' are put in quotation marks to indicate there is no independent id'entity', only an identity in relationship to others (Shotter, 2012; Gergen, 2009, p. 54). This is what Gergen would define as *confluence*. This describes forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1975) that work because of many different reciprocally defining entities. Note also, the quick, almost hidden few words that indicate solitude: *Getting left to my own devices. I could do what I want, like* (line: 604). Rob talks about his mother working full time, and also that he was on his own whilst homeless and in the homeless youth project. Rob may like to be in control of his own choices and path, to have his own *identity*, but he is fully aware of being *left* (line: 604) by 'entities' during this time. This feeling of solitude and possible isolation and its effects is discussed in more depth in *The Because Of* section below.

#### Social Spaces: Chucking magnesium into the pond

Rob narrates his connections with a number of social spaces that mediate the construction of his identity and afford him individual and social assets related to power. It is worth noting that unlike Tomas' narrative, where social spaces are abstract concepts of quiet and loud, Rob's narrative is analysed in a more geographical and sociological way. These spaces are constructed from social relations, which can be seen as a space within itself (Lefevre, 1991 [1974]). Rob speaks very quickly, and although there are misjudged words used in his speech, there is, I believe a high degree of philosophical thinking in some of his narrative sections where he considers his own position as a father and as a human in an infinite universe. This section also links to the concept of protest masculinity (Connell, 1995) which is considered in its own subheading in the *Because Of* section.

Rob's spaces are generally fraught with tension. Rob in fact, fights against such structured social spaces and tries to carve his own life experiences, and this is where it can be argued he finds a type of identity capital for a while. In opposition to Rob choosing his self-position in

the previous section, this section describes how he pushes against the structures and relationships in social spaces that he has little choice in entering. This reflects a Bourdieusian viewpoint where 'objective structures independent of the consciousness and will of the agent [and] are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations' (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 14). In this sense, social spaces are areas of possible power struggles, and the way in which Rob interprets these spaces shows the way in which these relationships are enacted. Examples below include how he navigates school, but this also includes his relationship with his mother. A further example of power struggles includes the space in his family home, which his mother alone worked on her own in order to pay off the mortgage. Note that he acknowledges that the house was his mother's but states that the house *is mine*:

There is no one else in the house then. Just me and my sister, who would stay with my Nan quite a lot. (J: yeah) the house was mine. I used to say it's my house at 12, 13 like. I'd invite all the boys in. I wrecked my mother's house I did. I destroyed it. I had parties in there. We would go on the mitch from school in there and pop the window. Stupid things like that. I was left to my own devices, and I could do what I wanted. Take over the house, kick a hole in the wall. Looking back, my mother had to sell that house because I destroyed it like. That would have been mine in the end. I spited myself in the long run. (lines: 662-626)

I wonder if Rob was aware of these power interplays in his spaces. He alludes to deep thinking and structural opposition in a further section on employment, where many of his life decisions are attributed to the ideological social constructions and grand narratives that were inflicted on both his parents. There are so many spaces that show Rob's push against the structural forces of society, including issues with education, anti-social behaviour, home, and relationships. There is little space in this chapter to include them all. However, they are interrelated and mediated by one another. I chose to analyse Rob's identity in the social space of education, as this was a part of the narrative which showed his own reaction to such space, and also his present-day reaction to it in light of his care of Nia. This showed a dichotomy in relationships where he sees Nia as being able to do what she wants to do, even to go to outer space if she works really hard in school.

School for Rob is difficult because he will not participate in lessons that provide no interest to him. It is worth remembering that Rob has a diagnosis of ADHD at twelve years old but is not medicated because he states his mother felt that she had been through *the worst of it* (line: 511). He does not connect with learning other than in science, and this is done on his own terms. This interest in science came from outside of the school environment by watching a solar eclipse when he was thirteen, and the interest in astronomy and chemistry are passed on to Nia in the present day. This is discussed in more depth in the *In Spite Of* section below.

I remember in the end it was the only lesson I went to school for. I wouldn't go to anything else. Dinner and science, I can't really remember too much after that, like. But I remember getting into it because of that and it was the one that stuck with me right the way through as well. I left school when I was thirteen. I was still going to dinner when I was fourteen or fifteen, like. But, I was just turning up for science. That was it. Dinner and science and then home then. If I didn't have science I wouldn't be in. (lines: 422-425)

The same, like, that when I dug my heels in with my mam like with school she went to the school and said look he's six foot two! I can't drag him to school anymore! If you can, get him to go, go on! I'll leave the door open for you! He's twice the size of me, like! And that's the way it sort of went in my house. It was a battle first of all, she'd come in with a bucket of water over me like, and I would go back to bed and wouldn't care. (lines: 608-612)

Well, one day we stole the magnesium that stands in my mind. Chucked it in a pond, like. We had fun with that. I can remember like, it used to interest me, like. The periodic table and that, and where all the elements came from, that sort of stuff caught me as well. So yeah, I did sort of chuck myself into it.

*J: You said about chucking the magnesium, into the pond...*

There was a lot of us boys together. You can imagine all boys together doing the male childish thing, we had fun with it, chucking it in, we were there for about two hours chucking it in the pond, like. (lines: 427-433)

Whatever the reason for not wanting to go to school, there is a rejection of the rules and symbolic practices (Bourdieu, 1991) of the school itself, including not following the set curriculum, and times of study. This rejection of symbolic practices links into his other narratives of social spaces that are not considered in this research, such as in a family funeral. His disengagement in the school space could be seen as a political act (Jones, 2015), where he pushes against the imbalance of a young person's agency and the forces of a school's structure and power. Schools could be classed as 'relational, social, or discursive spaces' (Baroutsis, *et al.*, 2017, p. 2) that are socially constructed. It is suggested that establishments such as schools produce models of interaction and practices that are full of symbolic practices that maintain existing power relations (Foucault, 1995). In the minority of learning environments, these power struggles are part of an ideological pedagogy, a change for discourse and thinking on both child and educator(s) part (see Moss, 2018 on Malaguzzi). However, it could be suggested that in the UK, structural school practices are used to standardise (Baroutsis, *et al.*, 2017) and control learning, space, and time in a school environment (Gordon, *et al.*, 2000). If Rob pushes against these structures, he becomes excluded from a major part of society (Allman, 2013) which enables him to achieve most forms of capital. This section is interesting for researchers who may feel the need to attribute some type of biological reasoning for the lack of 'engagement' in a school environment. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a perfectly good reason to attribute to Rob's perceived oppositional behaviour. However, Rob notes his awareness of his difference, but is also glad that he was not medicated for it:

I knew I was a bit hectic in school and all that. I know I was always a bit fidgety. I knew I was always outside the headmaster's office. I knew. They did have me seen by the psychiatric nurses and all that they said it was nothing to do with that like so obviously it was the ADHD. But then it was too late, my mother said. When we went through it, she had already gone through the worst of it, may as well leave him now that was done, like (lines: 508-512).

Well, to be honest, I'm not gutted, I think it's good (that he wasn't medicated). These doctors use you as a guinea pig. They are. They don't know what this stuff is doing to your brain, like. Anything that changes the chemistry of your brain and all that changes who you are, so I'm glad she didn't give them to me if I'm honest. (lines: 515-511)

The interesting part of the failure to medicate Rob for ADHD was that his mother believed it was too late for him to have any positive result from the medication. Rob's mother is portrayed as a bright woman with a job as a health specialist. I found the statement that she had already gone through the worst of it difficult to fathom because Rob was still possibly going through difficulties, and, as his narrative unfolds, this was not the worst of it. In his mother's defence, it is worth noting the historical positioning of how the media constructed the issue of ADHD and the use of methylphenidate, commonly known as Ritalin, to support a child to concentrate in a learning environment during this time. In the early 2000s, there was an increase in children being diagnosed with ADHD and given Ritalin, and a concern in the media that the medication was given too readily in high doses which sedated children and that it could be prone to misuse (Jofre, 2000; Coppock, 2002), and have no beneficial long term effects (*Panorama*, 2007). This would have been known to both Rob's mother and to him at the time. The idea that medication would potentially alter Rob's identity is a paradoxical concept in his narrative. I admit to being slightly amused at the irony of this revelation. Rob spent over ten years as a heavy drug user, probably altering his brain chemistry in a number of ways, including by his own admission, not being able to remember some parts of his life. However, this decision also has elements of opposing outside forces. It seems for Rob, what people in power prescribe could be seen as more of a risk to his own identity than what he prescribes himself.

His fascination with science has remained to the present day. The incident of taking the magnesium out of the classroom and using it in a pond with his friends shows a sense of childishness and adolescent tomfoolery. There is an element of wonder and awe at the process of the magnesium in the water. Further along in his narrative, he talks about his pride in Nia being a bright child and winning accolades from her teachers in school. Rob connects with the school and educational space as a father in a way that he did not do for himself. He encourages her learning and her perseverance:

When I'm gone off this rock that's what's left of me here, like. My kids. So, I try and give her the best start I can in life. Try and encourage her try and big her up the best I can. Any time she wants to do something I encourage her –

you can do it! She was saying that she wants to go into space. Work hard you can do it! Really hard! It's something you can do! I try not to squash any of her dreams like, so she can reach for the stars, innit! (lines: 539-543)

Nia wants to go to outer space; I envision them both enjoying learning together. In his narrative he talks about encouraging her learning where he teaches her to count to more than three hundred, by walking up steps, cooking and making cakes, and times where he plays with her on the river, watching her amazement when sticks float in the water. I envision Rob talking about the way the sun orbits the earth and solar eclipses. He would talk to her about the composition of planets and the elements. Maybe at night. There is a story behind the description of a father sharing his love of space and the elements and science with his daughter. Rob is, literally, aware of his positioning in space. He acknowledges that on a rock in a universe so vast, other social spaces may be somewhat unimportant. The only importance for Rob in the present day is to give the best start in life to Nia. This is done conversely through schooling by teaching and learning. In this respect, 'The Child is the father of the man' (Wordsworth, 1770-1805) and Rob blooms from his relationship with Nia. In this social space, Rob has to renegotiate his own experience of schooling to support his love for Nia. And Nia teaches him the things that he wished for and fought against as a child. Rob, it seems, is more in tune with his connection to the wider universe rather than the micro-macro spaces discussed in this study. However, this understanding, it seems, gives him a far greater philosophical understanding of his own self-positioning in the socially constructed world in which he lives.

### The Positioning of Others: Dragging their heels

Rob felt that social services were slow to organise his custody of Nia. He had been clean from drugs for a time, and he now says he believes they wanted to make sure he was properly clean. However, at the time, it didn't feel that way. Rob felt the social workers were against him, but this made him more determined to seek custody of Nia. Interestingly, this is the only time throughout his story that Rob does not react and works with power instead of pushing

against it for the ultimate goal of getting Nia home. He talks about the fact that he had let one of his children go in to care, and he was not going to let it happen to another.

It seemed like they were dragging their heels making me jump through hoops for nothing like. To be honest, I didn't think I'd get her back in the end. So, I thought they were doing this for nothing like. (*J: mmm*) Obviously I did have her home in the end but at the time, it felt like they were being extra hard on me on purpose. I know now it's not but looking back now, I can see that insight that it wasn't, but that's what they made me feel like I was doing everything wrong. I wasn't doing anything right...It just seemed like, well, to be honest it was every time. It was all, they were all chatty and yeah and all that, but it felt like we were all congregating against me like. It felt like I was on the outside and everything I had to do I had to battle against them like. So. (lines: 69-75)

Some I disagreed with definitely like, but I didn't want to go too hard against it because I thought it could mess things up for me like. (*J: Ummm*) So, I sort of bit my tongue and went with what they said like. (lines: 87-88)

The response of the social workers can be seen as a response to the environment of assessing suitability and risk for custody. Rob even admits that on reflection, this was probably acceptable practice as they were trying to make sure he was going to be able to manage to be a parent. However, he does state that many of the other parents who were being assessed for custody were acknowledged before him. It is not clear as to the gender of these parents. Yet, it is worth noting there is a body of literature that suggests there are a number of ways in which fathers are discriminated against in child welfare practices (Jaffe, 1983; Brewstough and Strozier, 2016), where they have been ignored and uninvolved (O'Hagan, 1997; Baynes and Holland, 2012) in the process. This may be due to a stereotypical view of fathers as needing to be held with suspicion, being bad or dangerous (Ferguson and Hogan, 2004; O'Donnell, *et al.*, 2005), and aggressive towards workers (Smithers, 2012). It has also been concluded in one study that social workers do not completely trust fathers to take care of their children (Dominelli, Strega, and Walmsley, 2011). Additionally a traditional perception of fathers roles was dominant in safeguarding, where fathers were perceived as unable to or unwilling to take care of their young children, and their roles and fatherhood



practices where in need of fixing (Page, *et al.*, 2008; Scourfield, 2001). It is worth noting that Rob felt that he had to *bite his tongue* during the process, which reflects the position that fathers are the 'unheard gender' in child protection work (Baum, 2016, p. 1463).

There is little research into the emotional impact of fathers who lose their children to the care system. Their needs are not generally considered in social work literature (Höjer, 2011). Schofield, *et al.*, (2011) considers parents with children in foster care but does not differentiate between fathers and mothers in the study (Baum, 2016). Only one study based in Israel (Baum and Negbi, 2013) focusses on fathers' responses to their children being in foster care to which they felt 'utterly devalued' and 'annihilated their parental identity' (Baum, 2016, p. 1466). Rob's narrative is unique in the way it offers a glimpse into not only the process of custody of a child by a father but of the emotional trauma involved in doing so. Rob does not only feel like this when he is engaging with social workers. He felt as if he was ostracised by women in the community. He talks about the times when he picked up Nia from school whilst she was still under the care of social services and a foster placement. He talks about the time when the women in the school yard ignored him and didn't include him in pick up time talk.

Then it was coming up to the time where I was supposed to be picking her up from school the first time and all that. That's when they were being like, they were all like whispering, I can't say whispering they weren't actually whispering, but it felt like they were all congregating away from me. Like, leave him out by there. Leave him in the side like, and we will go chat over by here. (Right). It felt like I was getting pushed aside.... (lines: 102-105)

All women as well like, seeing me, I felt out of place anyway like and when they are all jumping aside it was like. I felt even more pushed away, like. Mmmmmmm, seems a bit strange to me like. I dunno, they were all chatting away, and I dunno what they were on about if I'm honest. It felt like, they were like, uhh, we got to get rid of him like just leave him chatting on a corner on his own like whatever.

*J: OK. Mmm.*

That's what they made me feel at the time. I'm not sure if that's what they are meant to do like, but that's what it made me at the time, they made me feel like they are doing this on purpose. (*J: mmm*) Well, I dug my heels in if I'm honest. That's it. It made me feel like that. (lines: 107-114)

Rob states that others position themselves away from him during this time. He talks about them jumping aside and making him feel isolated. Rob talks as if the women, because they were women, should have been more open to him, possibly more supportive. However, they ostracise him, and there is a physical reaction to him moving among them in the school yard: they jump out of the way, they whisper. It is not clear why Rob thought they did this, but it could have been because they knew his background as a drug user and that Nia was in foster placement. They possibly knew her foster family. It may well have been because he was a man in the playground. Although a female-only study, it has been recognised that social stigma is a 'powerful burden' on parents whose children are in the care system (Kenney and Barrington, 2018, p. 215). This is added to the stigmatisation of people who have drug problems (Lloyd, 2010), and a social viewpoint that they are 'junkie scum' or 'once a junkie, always a junkie' (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010, p. 1). Also, although there are a growing number of single fathers in the UK, currently at 300, 000 (Lancet Editorial, 2018), they are less likely to have social networks that could help enhance their well-being (Ravanera, 2007). A recent Canadian study posited that this is likely to impact on isolation and loneliness and may be one reason why it found single fathers to have twice as likely high mortality rates than single mothers (Chiu, *et al.*, 2018). This is a heady mix in terms of isolation and the positioning of others. Interestingly, one of the highlighted issues is that Rob positions himself as an outsider by the choices he makes, but it seems that it became very apparent to Rob that he was treated as an outsider when he wanted to connect during this time. Tellingly, although the section starts with Rob talking about social services dragging their heels, it moves into a narrative of marginalisation. The response from Rob is of determination rather than resignation. He also digs his heels in to fight for custody for Nia. However, possibly one of the reasons Rob has voluntarily remained in Dad's group for so long is the effect of this marginalisation and that this becomes a safe space where he is an insider with others.

## The Because Of:

### Protest masculinity

Although there is a recognition of the pluralistic nature of masculinity (Roberts, 2012; Connell, 2005), there have been a number of studies relating to working-class or disadvantaged young males that focus on what may be classed as anti-social behaviour (Willis, 1977; Connell, *et al.*, 2005; Connell, 2000; Nyak, 2006; Nixon, 2009; Gill, 2003; Palasinski, *et al.*, 2019; Holligan and McLean, 2018; Whitehead, 2002; Connell, 2005). Protest masculinity has been described as a response to powerlessness and marginalization; 'making a claim to power where there is no real resources for power' (Connell, 1995, p. 111), through means of violence, criminality, drug misuse, shunning mainstream life, education, and employment. This is in line with the idea of hegemonic masculinity; a way of describing how society has been able to control men through consent rather than coercion (Connell, *et al.*, 2005) through the positive emanation of attributes such as 'domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness...stoicism and control' (Cheng, 1999, p. 298) in men. This is difficult for most men to achieve (Edley, 2017; Roberts, 2017) but is most likely to be found in 'white, middle class, able bodied men' (Roberts, 2017, p. 47) who have complexities of character and experience. Hegemonic masculinity requires a need for only a minority of heterosexual men to perform and express the pattern of behaviour, and assert dominance over more perceptively subordinate groups of society, such as homosexuals, women and others (Whitehead, 2002; Jewkes, *et al.*, 2015; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity, behaviours such as domination in his home he shared with his mother and aggressiveness coincide with types of protest masculinity, as seen in the Social Spaces section. As he develops into a young man, this then requires new actions, due to a possible recognition of powerlessness. Rob then looks to connect with homeless people and sex workers, marginalized people in more depth, and moves to establish identity capital within those worlds. It seems the lack of power from not being able to assert hegemonic masculinity within his adult world leads to finding new identity capital in different places.

The transformation of protest masculinity, from a push against support systems in youth and an identification with marginalised people to a push against prejudgements of men in areas of disadvantage and fatherhood, is a thread that weaves in and out of the *Because Of* and *In Spite Of* sections of this exploration. This culminates in some thoughts around the changing nature of protest masculinity and fathers in areas of disadvantage in Chapter 7. This section, in particular, considers some of the reasons that could be attributed to the push against, namely, Rob's experiences of his parents' employment, his isolation, and his decision to become homeless.

Although there is around ten years' difference in age between Rob and myself, there were a number of similarities in terms of how family roles have changed. This included how economic hardships in South Wales contributed to the role reversal of working women, whilst men like Rob's father became part of a number of young physically active men 'going on the sick' (Beatty, *et al.*, 2017a). This led me to question whether this role reversal had some impact on Rob's past life choices and experiences and also informed his own values of not being concerned about work and being an active father to Nia. Historically, employment in South Wales relied on the existence of heavy industry. During the 1970s onwards, there were significant job losses in Wales in terms of specialised manual labour from coal mining and steel work that were never fully replaced by light manufacturing industries (Ishyama and Breuning, 1998). There were also significant industry and manufacturing losses during the 1990s-2000s (Kelsey, 2017) leading to increases in unemployment in the male workforce. It is difficult to find accurate employment data from earlier than 1992 (Sensier and Artis, 2011), however, the graph below shows the impact of unemployment during the recession in Wales during Rob's childhood in the 1990s:

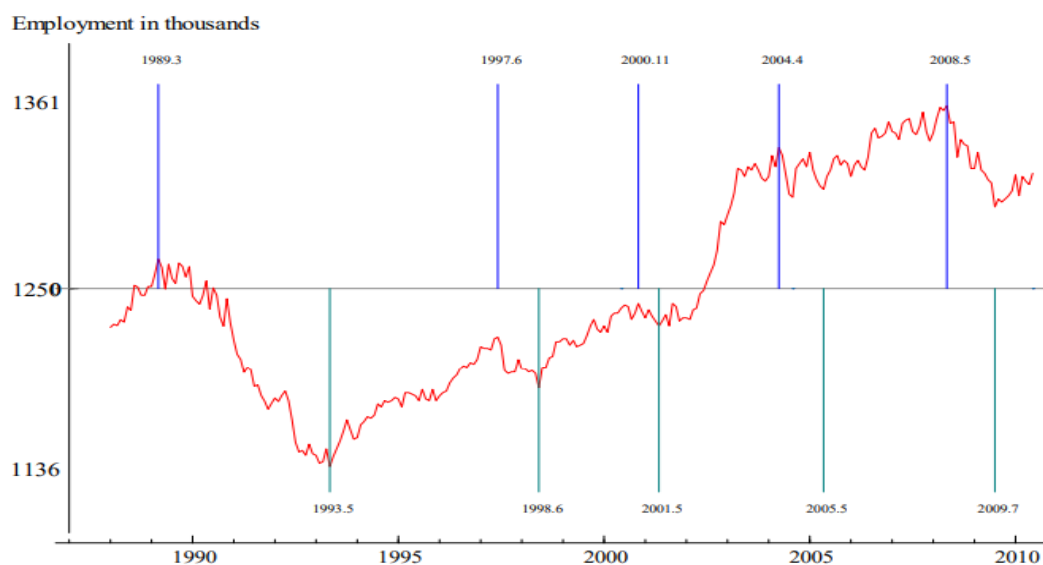


Figure 15: Turning Points for Welsh Employment (Sensier and Artis, 2011, p.5)

These figures need to be analysed in more detail to provide a more transparent view of the experience of working-age people in South Wales at the time. It is reported that in many areas of heavy industry, there were no differences in the number of unemployment claimants than when industries were active. Many became what was termed as ‘economically inactive’ and had ‘permanent sickness’ rather than ‘unemployed’ (Beatty, Fothergill, and Gore, 2017a). It is suggested that this movement of men from the unemployment statistics to being ‘on the sick’ leads to hidden unemployment statistics that still exists today (Beatty, Fothergill, and Gore, 2017b). This links to a perceived disruption of the masculine identity of fathers as providers (Honeyman, 2000) for a family structure. Conversely, women within the community started working more often and for longer hours, which has now led to rising employment for women and a fall for men (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

This is reflected in Rob’s narrative where his mother works full time and long hours, and his father is on sickness benefits for a long time. During this time, it can be argued that Wales had traditional values and gender stereotypes (Chwarae Teg, 2015). Male unemployment or sickness may disrupt the norm of the notion of a male breadwinner and female carer or homemaker traditional value system (Crompton, Lewis, and Lyonette, 2007). For men, work can be seen as a ‘rite of passage’ (Nixon, 2017, p. 54) and an entry into adulthood. This removal of masculine identity ‘breadwinner, provider, leader of the family and role model’ (Winlow, 2001, p. 37) can lead to pressure (Cornwall, Karioris, and Lindisfarne, 2016), which

can exacerbate tensions and conflict rather than a sense of pride and enthusiasm (Kimmel, 1996). The economic situation in South Wales may have contributed to the dissolution of some of the idealised masculine identities and fatherhood practices. This included status from hard work, being a breadwinner and being generally detached from emotional and family life (Schmitz, 2016):

I'm quite emotionally stable. But devoid as well. Well, I won't say devoid, but it's hard for me to get in touch with my emotions. Because I never had that like. I want to try and show Nia that there is different ways like that for her. (lines: 554-557)

Unemployment can have an extreme impact on well-being, especially in communities that suffer from economic deprivation and (Davies, *et al.*, 2018). On a physical level, this is demonstrated by the use of increased primary care services, chronic illness (Beale and Nethercott, 1987), alcohol-related issues (Browning and Heinesen, 2012), poor mental health, self-harm, and suicide (Kuhn, *et al.*, 2009; Browning and Heinesen, 2012). On a social level, this impacts on families through financial hardship including a breakdown of relationships, divorce, and domestic violence. On a community level, there is evidence of an impact on feelings of loss and social isolation (Davies, *et al.*, 2017). This could be argued as part of Rob's narrative. Rob's father was reportedly unwell whilst his mother worked full-time and did not have time to spend with Rob. There may have been underlying socio-relational factors, such as the changing identity of masculinity and family structure due to the economic difficulties of the time. It can be suggested, Rob is left in free-fall, with no real leadership in terms of identity, and this leads to a protest which manifests itself in some of Rob's behaviours and lifestyle choices. His father's own exclusion from the labour market may have enabled him to think that he himself did not need to follow society's rules with regard to employment. This remains a value that Rob holds dear and is discussed in the *In Spite Of* subheading.

Interestingly, Rob takes a lot of time to tell me about the five-week period when he was homeless, and this is a jump in the narrative from home to homelessness. This leads me to

believe that it is important to him at some point to show me that he identifies with the most excluded members of that society. Here, I believe there is another form of protest masculinity, whereby Rob is powerless in the traditional roles of family and community values and finds power with the most marginalized people in society. Rob finds identity capital, resources, and power in ways in which were not visible in his previous life story. He connects with people. Rob describes the time when he decides to leave his mother's house:

I was sofa surfing and stuff like that and staying with prostitutes and all that. Mad up and down time of my life... Yeah, they took me under their wing, they did because I was a kid. None of them tries nothing, you know what I mean, they just was like "you can come and stay on my couch" like, "come with me boy", and they would help me out and stuff like that. They were pretty tidy with me as it goes. Some of them were alright, like. I will always respect them for that as well. It's not the best job in the world for them. Most of them are in that position because they need to be in that position, like. There's not much else they can do. I've heard that from the horse's mouth literally like, so but, uh yeah, they sort of did help me out. It was a crazy time, like (*J: yeah?*). Most of them were pretty sound... They had some wild parties the prostitutes like ((laughs)) yeah, they did like! Being a kid, you can imagine it was quite awestruck about what was going on in these parties, like. It's wasn't like disgusting stuff. It was just like parties and drink and drugs... (lines: 301-311)

Well, when I first started sleeping on the streets the homeless helped me out. They took me down by the river and showed me the heaters by the local council building. They took me under their wing, like. The homeless heads. That's what I mean I was quite lucky when I was on the street, I was quite lucky I stuck with people that know what they were doing, like. They give me years of experience. It was a cold night one night and one of them said, use loads of papers in your clothes, like. Keeping warm like. I wouldn't have thought of that, like. It worked though. Things like that helped me out at the time like anyway...

(...) All of them man, most of them older heads helped me out. Yeah when one of the first times I was out on the streets they took me down there and said, you can sleep in the warmth, we will all stay round by you in the night if you want to get a couple of hours with people watching you. Basically. They did that for a few nights, for the first two weeks I was homeless, like. Everyone was down there with them. After a couple of weeks there, like, I started sofa surfing being around people, and met the prostitutes then. (*J: yeah?*) And a

couple of the boys, like. So, yeah. Changed them like. As I said, they did help me out like. I will always remember that too like.

*J: You said that you were cold one night with the papers do you remember that night particularly strongly?*

Yeah, I was cold to the bone. I did contemplate walking to Christown to my mother's like, from town at two o' clock in the morning cos I couldn't sleep, like. I didn't in the end, like. It did cross my mind at that time, like. I was freezing. I felt chilled to the bone, like. But uh, obviously I got over it. It wasn't like that the next night, so. At the time it was horrible. I didn't sleep at all. Hardly nothing. I was frozen. Hands and feet. Horrible. Glad that's done. I don't have to put up with that crap if I'm honest. (lines: 323-361)

Although Rob connects with people who are marginalized, he does not stay in these situations for long. He wants to tell me further that he then gets a supervised young homeless place, 'my party house' (line: 328), and then his own council house six weeks later. Like his assertion that his mother's house was 'my house' at twelve or thirteen, there is a sense of ownership of his environment, even though the environment he lives is owned by others. This idea of appropriating and controlling the material environment which is in reality owned and organised by outsiders such as the Local Authority or his mother is called 'Territoriality' and has been recognised as an extremely important resource for young men who are excluded from society (Robins and Cohen, 1978, p. 73).

His relationships help him to survive as a youth on the streets. And note here, that this is survival, not a warm, restful place where capital can be built on in a safe manner, like in schools or at home. This type of street social capital (Ilan, 2013), of having relationships in disadvantage could be classed negative, as downward levelling pressures (Portes and Landolt, 1996) where people in a community are held down rather than raised up (Claridge, 2004), and where such capital facilitates rather than reduces crime, ill-health and educational underachievement (Aldridge, *et al.*, 2002). But for Rob, he talks as if these relationships saved him from further harm, and this needs to be acknowledged.

Interestingly, Rob may well have received a lot of support from 'services' and structures, such as the Dad's group he has attended for three years, social services, drugs projects, youth



projects, and even family, but it is only the relationships formed with homeless people and sex workers that he respects for helping him. This highlights a level of power that is determined by respect for people who help him or that are from similar or less powerful positions than himself. This may be interesting for workers in a variety of settings. Even though there may be a high level of input and support from outside agencies, sometimes more value is put on the relationships within communities than offered by those with objective meanings and support, especially during times of the greatest need. Rob had sex workers to keep him safe and away from the streets, and homeless people to look out for him whilst sleeping, and show him how to keep warm. These are fundamental Maslowesque basic needs (Maslow, 1966). Even when Rob eschews the structures of family, becomes stubborn, childish, and in general *'digs his heels in,'* he cannot prevent the relationships that form confluence (Gergen, 2009); the idea that he is part of the relational structure around him and the situation that he is in. He is part of the narrative of each person, and they are of his.

### Being left alone

As discussed in the Self-Positioning section, Rob describes there were times where he was left alone, and as he states having to fend for himself. This is his own understanding that led him to behave in ways that he now reflects on as stupid. Rob's narrative highlights his own understanding of how he now finds it difficult to show emotional responses and how his told experiences shape him as a father to Nia, and his values in terms of his own actions, which can be found in the *In Spite Of* section below:

Making food quite young and stuff like that, doing own clothes and stuff like that about 11, 12 and doing all that sort of stuff, like. I was quite independent. I had to because that was the way that it was brung on to me do you know what I mean? I should watch that with Nia mind 'cos I say to her she can do loads and she is only 6 like. So, but yeah, I can sort of see that side like. But I should have had people there to show me this is the right way to do things, or this us how you shouldn't do this. But I've managed to get where I am today like. I'm not too bad, am I? So. That's the way I, well my mam did what she done for me and I know she did she kept a roof over my head and food in my

stomach like. So, at the time probably yeah, but it's done and dusted now it's no point dwelling on the past. (lines: 210-216)

My mother wasn't there my father wasn't there. Physically and emotionally for me like. So, I don't know how that – well I suppose that has had an effect into my adult like because I am quite, uh, in some situations its good in some it is bad. My uncle's funeral two weeks ago. Everyone is crying on me and I'm like shit! I can't wait to get out of here. How long is it till we get out of this then? I'm sitting there no crying and I'm thinking fucking hell c'mon, I need to go. I'm quite emotionally stable. But devoid as well, well I won't say devoid, but it's hard for me to get in touch with my emotions. (lines: 550-554)

Getting left to my own devices. I could do what I want like and gone then. Let's go burn something down or do this or, stupid things, like. (lines: 604-605)

As a young person, it seems being left alone does not just leave Rob excluded from external society, but inhibits his ability to function in a family unit and find emotions that help him connect in groups of people close to him. Some of these behaviours are seen in Rob's story.

There is no suggestion of conscious abuse by either parent. Indeed, Rob states his mother works hard to feed and keep a roof over his head. However, there is a comment that both parents were not there physically and emotionally for Rob, but this could have been because of character, personality, culture, and time rather than intent. Under the difficult circumstances of managing a mortgage, Rob's mother possibly had to work hard and long hours, having to make difficult choices in relation to care for her children (Belle, 1999). There have been numerous worldwide studies on the well-being effects of children who self-care. Children who self-care whilst parents work in this way are commonly termed as 'latchkey' children in policy. For example, some children who are mature enough to take the extra responsibility may find that this can increase their independence and confidence (Reiley and Steinberg, 2004). However, there are downsides (Rajalakshmi and Thanasekaran, 2015). Younger children report feeling lonely, fearful, and bored (Long and Long, 1983). There is also a risk of children who are left alone more frequently than once a week, showing hyperactivity, inattention, and peer relationship problems (Doi, *et al.*, 2018). Depression is also found in mid school children left for more than three hours every day (Mertens, *et al.*,

2003). Behavioural problems have also been noted in adolescent research (Atherton Schofield, and Sitka, 2016). 'Hanging out' with friends during parents' work time also increased risk of conduct problems (Galambos and Maggs, 1991), and exposure to the risk of substance misuse (Richardson, *et al.*, 1989). Furthermore, if an environment is not as emotionally nurturing as needed, it can be said to be a 'pathogenic relational environment' (Wright, Crawford, and Del Castillo, 2009), where emotional distance within close relational environments can create illness. In Rob's narrative, the dissociative element of the relational environment has been clear throughout the analysis and in terms of being alone, plays once again on all spaces related to the study; social space, self-positioning and others positioning in the narrative, each of these having a negative consequence in Rob's experience.

Recent policy on loneliness and isolation highlights young people 16-24 years old as reporting feeling lonelier than those of older age groups in Wales (National Assembly Wales, 2017; Welsh Government, 2018b). The research also acknowledges a number of studies that link the issue of loneliness and mental/physical ill health older life (Perlman and Peplau, 1984; Holt-Lunstad, *et al.*, 2010; Hawkey, *et al.*, 2010). Social isolation can be described as a 'distancing of an individual, psychologically or physically, or both from his desired or needed relationships with other persons' (Luskin Biordi and Nicholson, 2013, p. 97), and an 'inadequate quality and quantity of social relations' (Zavaleta and Mills, 2014, p. 5). This distancing may be self-inflicted at times for Rob, but there is also a feeling that there is a distancing from others. This is evidenced in the words used to describe belonging and his home; he describes the house as his *mother's* house rather than *our* house. Conversely, he also justifies his actions by thinking at the time that it was *his* house (lines: 620-626). This may highlight the issue of territoriality discussed previously, but also can hint at the distancing of social isolation and the lack of belonging experienced by Rob during this time.

## The *In Spite Of*:

I am conscious that this section can be repeated throughout the three stories as the 'happy ever after' (Crites, 1997; Purnell and Bowman, 2014) narrative without much critical thought. It would be easy to compile a list of all the positive aspects that have happened since Rob has had custody of Nia and turned his life around. Indeed, becoming a father in itself has been shown to have positive developmental effects on a man's life (Palkovitz, 2002), demonstrated in Rob's narrative as being closer to his own family unit. As his narrative expands, he shows a softening in his attitude towards the acceptance of his previous actions, as well as a relationship with his own father:

For about five to six years, me and my mother were really sketchy. I'd see her maybe one every once every couple of months sometimes or maybe every six months to a year. We were alright we were on civil terms but that was about it. Before I sort of blamed her a bit. Now I'm older I can see now I know what she done what she done. I sort of blamed her for a lot of the shit that was my fault. I should have taken responsibility for it. (lines: 628-632)

Nia likes being in the woods. She is an outdoorsy type of girl she is gonna grow up to be one of them types likes to go up mountains. Walks up the mountain. She loves going down by the river. She stands by the river for two hours chucking things in making boats. My father is like that as well. He's into animals so I'm gonna try and get them two to go to the wetlands together. She will love it he will love it cos it's his passion. He goes out and spent a thousand on a lens the other day. It shows. He did win one a holiday to Spain ((from a photograph competition)). He is pretty good at it like. Not for me like. He took me to the wetlands once and said here are some binoculars and I was like what are they for? ((laughs)) have a look at the animals! I was like I can see them fine dad! ((laughs)). (lines: 651-656)

However, Rob's narrative becomes complex and it was difficult to completely polarise the *Because Of* and *In Spite Of* sections for the research framework design. Rob's case is not clear cut. For now, it is worth exploring the subheading of *In Spite Of* in a slightly different way. It is acceptable to state that *In Spite Of* the difficulties in Rob's life, he is able to parent Nia in a

fulfilling way. But, it can be argued that *Because Of* his experiences, Rob parents in a way that differs from his own experiences and deviates from previous cultural norms and values.

#### Making the change from the norm:

I was making the change from the norm. That's what it was. I was changing what had happened, probably what had happened for hundreds of years in my family because you do what you see, not what you're told. So, my mother is mothering the way she's seen, and she is mothering the way she seen. And that's going back hundred- it's the same as my father wasn't involved then I see his father wasn't involved with him, so he is just carrying it on. So, I am just changing the norm of what's been going on in my family for years. (lines: 545-549)

Rob follows his own path, or tightrope (Bateson, 1973), where he is active in his agency. Rob, who had remained strong about his convictions in the way that he wants to father Nia reflects his own life narrative and agency. This type of choice of identity capital lies in Rob's reflections on his own background and leads back to the idea of going against a cultural norm seen in the self-positioning section. Although Rob received set guidelines from Social Services around to assist his care for Nia, he has a chance to create fatherhood in a way that suits him rather than is governed by times, rules and family values that would be different if Nia's mother was still a part of her life. This is seen in Rob's own views on his firstborn son, Jay and the relationship with Jay's mother and also his shock at losing his second-born daughter to the care system:

I wasn't seeing my boy ((Jay)) as much and- that was both of us as well-it wasn't just down to me like. 'Cos I did ask and she'd be ohh I'm busy today and when she'd say, I'd be like ohh I got to do this. It sort of went, it went, I can't say it went bad, we went our separate ways in the end. She got with this boy and I went partying doing whatever I was doing, childish again. And well, we are where we are now...My boy is 13 now... That makes me feel old that does. I can remember being 13 myself. Well just about, just about, like. (lines: 399-404)

I didn't find out about it for two years. the ex-missus didn't tell him (the social worker) about me until it was a year and a half into the case and when it was actually about the time they came to find me 'en, they were already looking to adopt out. I said look I'll take her and all this and they were like, look we already final stages of it basically like and there's no chance we are going to go back on it now. (lines: 133-136)

Rob's previous experiences influenced his action with regard to Nia. The gift of fatherhood is seemingly a gift and an identity capital resource for Rob that catapults him even further into choosing to turn his life around. Rob states that Nia had already been in care until she was four years old, and by this time he had already started to make changes in his life. Although still on methadone (a prescribed heroin substitute), Rob had started to make some positive changes and started connecting with his family again. Becoming a father, in general, encourages the adoption of an identity, a shedding of previous behaviours, and adopting others. For each identity, there may be a set of behaviours associated with the belonging to a certain social group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Frame, 2016), and there could be any number of behaviours and identities such as son, brother, father, drug taker or homeless person. Each one impacts on a 'symbolic sphere that determines specific social positions' (Negura and Deslauriers, 2010, p. 2656). Rob does not have the luxury of paternal identity from connecting with the mothers of his children. In interviews with divorced fathers, men's paternal identity as fathers is seen as being constructed through their relationships with the mothers of their children (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). This is not seen in mother's interviews of maternal identity, where mothers will talk about being a mother far more independently from the father (Dermott, 2008; Pleck and Levine, 2002; Miller, 2011b). There seems to be a gendered way of constructing fatherhood that permeates the narratives of men, which are reliant on the actions and connections to mothers. However, this is not possible in Rob's case, and he relies on connections with his mother and sister, with whom he reconnects with and his reflections on how fathers in his culture, including his own father 'do fatherhood.'

Rob's social representation of a father relies on being part of his own family, going to his sister's and mother's homes, *decent places* (line: 525), that allows him to develop his identity as a father. Rob's development as a father reflects to research on young fathers and their shedding of identities related to drug-taking, violent, and anti-social behaviour (Negura and Deslauriers, 2010). Rob relies on his mother and sister, who live in *decent places*, where he can develop his own paternal identity in safe and secure ways and reliant on the female safety of his family to support it. Note previously of Rob's disappointment in the playground of Nia's school when the women shunned him. Rob was embraced by his sister and mother in becoming a father and expected the community to do the same for him. He was therefore disappointed when the women shunned him in the playground of Nia's school. This is not surprising when considering the construction of fatherhood in Rob's own life. Rob reflects on his own cultural and familial history of being a father:

One day a week we'd see him. As I said. Times were different then. You wouldn't have seen men pushing a pram down the road or looking after his kids then cos that's the way society was, so it's not his fault really but... (lines: 222-224)

As I say, my father wasn't there at all, I'd see him once a week so that's a total difference. My old man said to me a few months back he said, I'm proud of you like, what that for? What you have done with Nia like. I was like thinking yeah, you're probably looking back thinking, yeah! you could have done a lot more with me. But times were different back then. I don't hold it against you, but he's probably looking at me thinking now I could have done a hell of a lot more like, and I wasn't there much, and I didn't do much. It wasn't his fault his father was the same as him. It's probably been like that for years in his family. But I've changed that already, so that's one way of breaking the mould. (lines: 565-570)

It is worth reflecting back on the literature review to remember that fatherhood is individual, personal, and contextual for all fathers (Dermott, 2008). There are various forms of 'doing masculinity' (Roberts, 2012, p. 678) as well as 'doing fatherhood.' As in Tomas' narrative, there are dominant themes, especially in working-class or disadvantaged areas, in terms of viewing fathers as having a hands-off approach to fatherhood. However, this view has been

argued as a myth, and children did, in fact, have strong physical and emotional ties to their fathers (Strange, 2018). For example, post- World War 2, pram pushing could prove a way of showing that fathers were accepting a new way of being active fathers, however many signs of active father participation were hidden behind closed doors in homes rather than in public (King, 2015). The behind closed doors, or private fathering was more prevalent in working-class families than in wealthier families (Roy, 2004) and public fathering, such as school event attendance was more likely in affluent families (Shows and Gerstel, 2009; Stykes, 2015). This corresponds with Rob's narrative around the lack of public fathering in his experiences.

### I wouldn't go work myself to death

Rob's experience of having sole responsibility for the care of Nia and his previous experiences of seeing his own parents working and trying to raise children seems to have had a profound effect on his philosophy of parenting and life. Employment is a 'long term, consistent, full time, and almost universal' element of a man's life (Townsend, 2002, p. 117) and is seen as crucial to fathering success throughout all social classes (Stykes, 2015). Rob feels he needs to be home for Nia and pushes back on the 'malestream' (O'Brien, 1981), inspired by the word 'mainstream,' which sees fatherhood as a social set of constructions that reproduce masculine practices, and is linked to employment. For example, the need for women to have a work-life balance and men to be a breadwinner to the detriment of having close bonds with their children (Doucet, 2006; Doucet, 2017).

Rob's insistence on being with Nia and not finding work is at odds with the idea that fathers feel that they should provide for their children through employment and get a number of positive personal outcomes by going to work (Roy, 2004). However, work pressures have been shown to make men reluctant or unable to contribute significantly to family life (Williams, 2010), and providing alone does not indicate a fulfilling fatherhood role (Shirani, *et al.*, 2012). This can be seen in Rob's narratives of his own father and mother's work-life history:



Like, at the minute, I'm more for Nia. I'm happy spending time with her. Alright, I wouldn't mind a part-time job like, but I wouldn't go work myself to death. Like I'd rather spend the time with the kids like. Who's gonna look after me when I'm old like? It's not gonna be the government is it? The ones we pay our money to an all that. It's gonna be our kids innit? (lines: 206-209)

Well I see the two sides don't I. Mother worked constant, and my father is 60 odd and he has worked himself into the grave like. What's he getting? A piece of paper at the end of the day like. I dunno. I'd rather have a love of my kids I think. Personally, that's much more of value to me. That's much more rewarding. (lines: 235-237)

...a lot more gratifying for me than working myself into the ground if I'm personally honest. I want to be able to do something like. Cos (with a job) you make friends like that and you get a social side of it, like, well, you make friends like. You make friends from work, you go out and have a drink with friends from work you met associates and friends that ways and all and I want that sort of side for it as well, but I am not going to kill myself for it either. (lines: 252 257)

Being present for Nia is fundamental in Rob's view. There are also ethical and moral aspects to the narrative in relation to his own experiences of work that was too hard and too long for his own parents. This is reflected in the type of jobs that are available to people who live in places of disadvantage. Firstly, not working himself to death to the detriment of his relationship with Nia (like his father and mother). Secondly, creating relationships where Nia and his other children will look after him when he is old because he is aware of not having support from the state when he is older. To address the first point, indeed, there has been a significant amount of interest in fatherhood and issues surrounding fathers being more involved with their children. However, these seem to be more directed towards issues with working fathers rather than the unemployed wanting more time with their children (Modern Families Index, 2017). One study (Wolff, *et al.*, 2011) provided a glimpse of Rob's situation in terms of a mother not being able to care for their child due to mental or physical illness, however in a different context. Merla's (2008) study stated that the three unemployed fathers in her study highlighted low employment prospects and disappointing work conditions as the catalyst for them becoming stay at home fathers and this being a source of self-fulfilment. However, the majority of studies that concentrate on stay at home fathers

revolve around the choices of a couple where the other partner earns more or is in a more fulfilling role (Hunter, 2017). It is only in Roy's (2004) American study that concentrates on single parent fathers in disadvantage, and this provides a rather evangelic view of employment and work as ways of being a good father. For Rob, providing for Nia means providing a present father rather than providing finance from a job that would quite possibly mean he would be on minimum wage and working many hours. Luckily for Rob, there is a type of social support system in the UK that can help him do this without working for the first few years of Nia's life. The second point is also contextual and in line with the issues surrounding disadvantage. Rob is aware that he may well be alone when he is old and that the government would not look after him. Rob does not have a pension and has never worked. His reliance now is on making a meaningful connection with Nia, which he sees as vitally important for his own future survival. This is in contrast to the other relationships formed as a homeless person, in a young people's homeless project, with a variety of support workers and even with his own mother. These were temporary relationships with a means to a specific end. Here, Rob is looking at long term goals and believes he will need someone else for his own survival. Being able to care for children alone can have incredible changes for men, which emphasise the types of relational beings that they are (Doucet, 2017), and which dependence and interdependence are central to human existence (Robinson 2011). Rob and Nia's interdependence is a far cry from the choice of being able to give up work and live off savings or another partner's wage. I wished I could have asked Rob whether he would look after his father when he was old.

## *Adam's Lived Life*

Adam is 48 years old and lives with his two and a half-year-old daughter Tamara. He has been attending Dad's group for nearly three years. Tamara was put to his care at 4 months old because of her mother's unpredictable behaviour. Adam states he also has a nine-year-old stepson, Billy, who is Tamara's brother but not biologically his. Billy still lives with Tamara's mother, and Adam sees him every other Easter and in the holidays. Adam also has a ten-year-old son from a previous relationship, Josh, but he finds it difficult to see him. He talks about four meaningful relationships with women in his life story, some of which had their own children prior to the relationship starting. He does not see his other previous stepchildren.

Adam was born in London and lived with his mother, father, and older brother. His father worked hard, and at times had three jobs. His mother looked after animals for a charity, and they had many animals in their house. At the age of around five, Adam had encephalitis, which was a serious illness and left him in a coma for a number of weeks. After getting better, he suffered with memory loss. He stated he had friends before this, but they advanced quicker than he did, and this left him lonely. In addition, his mother and father arranged for his brother to look after him therefore, he did not have opportunity to make any further friends. His brother was violent towards him and others as a child, which meant when his brother was expelled from school for violence, he had to follow him to a new school. He has not spoken to his brother for over ten years because of the abusive behaviour and is unsure if he is alive. He remembers his mother smoking around 60 cigarettes a day and had a feeling she cared for the animals more than him and his father. He was bullied in school because of the smell on his clothes. He does remember going to a caravan they used to own in Weston Super Mare with his father and having a lovely time and having friends around this time.

Adam met an older woman when he was 21, who had a number of grown children. He lived with her in a very violent part of London, and her children disliked him. They had previously made allegations of abuse towards others in the community, and during this time, they made allegations of sexual misconduct towards Adam, which he states were false. He states this was a way of the children ensuring he was not part of the family. At the time, the police were involved, and they arrested him. It went to court but was quickly overturned. Subsequently,

Adam's life was plagued by the allegation. It was seen by prospective employers on a Disclosure and Barring System check (DBS) every time he went for a job. This affected his life tremendously and still does to this day. On the day of the court case, his mother dropped dead because of stroke. Adam believes this was due to the stress of the situation. She was 54.

He then lived with a Belgian woman for some time, but when she went to University, her outlook changed, and they drifted apart. He then entered into a relationship with a French woman for thirteen years and had a child, Josh, after a long time in the relationship. Because of the allegations, he could not get a job doing something he liked, which at the time was care work. As a result, he became a stay at home parent and worked towards becoming self-employed as a computer expert, which was something he enjoyed doing. His partner became the sole earner in the family unit and worked on the Underground. She had a daughter, and although he was close to her as a child, he found it difficult to get along with her as a teenager. During this relationship, his father died. He was close to his father, and he felt his partner did not support him emotionally through this experience. He also paid the mortgage off from the money left to him by his father. She ended the relationship as soon as this happened, and Adam was left to find another house. He found out later that she had been having an affair at work.

He then met an African woman, Chandie, who was deeply religious. She had a son, Billy, who was five at the time. The first day that he met him, Adam was introduced to Billy as his father. The relationship became abusive, with Chandie being physically and mentally abusive towards him. Social Services were involved with Chandie and her son. Adam did not know of this until Chandie was pregnant with his daughter Tamara. Whilst pregnant, Chandie locked Adam in the house. He telephoned the social worker for help as he did not want to get her into trouble with the police. He stayed with Chandie in the first few months of Tamara's life but then felt he had to move as the relationship and home environment was so abusive.

Adam moved to Wales, and was still in contact with the children through Social Services. Chandie's behaviour became more difficult, and there was an incident where she hit a social worker whilst Tamara was in her arms. Adam was asked to look after Tamara in Wales. Adam now has legal guardianship over Tamara. He sees Billy every other Easter and Christmas. He sees Josh infrequently because of his ex-partner ignoring his concerns and his stepdaughter being the gatekeeper of communication. Adam has had difficulties in feeling safe due to harassment by Chandie and her making allegations about him being a child abuser to his neighbours in Wales, which has culminated in Chandie having a harassment and restraining order against her. He has suffered a lot of harassment in the community because of this and has found solace in the Dad's group, which he has been attending for over 2 years. He is a chairperson of the Credit Union and helps fathers who attend group save money by paying into a savings account every week.

### *The Told Story*

I met Adam in a Dad's group, and he was keen to tell me his story. At this point, he had attended the group for two and a half years and was eager to tell me how much it has helped him during this time. Adam was worried that Dad's group was ending due to service cuts and that there would be no services for men like him. We organised a meeting during a further group session as Tamara was able to use the crèche facilities during this time. I went to the group of fathers and listened in on some of the group activity. They were discussing child behaviour with the Dad's worker. Adam told me he had heard the session before so did not mind missing it. He said he loved the child psychology part of the work covered in the group. Adam sets the scene for the narrative in sub-session 1 by describing his childhood and his brother's violence towards him. Adam spoke at length about his life with no interruptions. A lot of the information given in the sub-session 1 can be found in the Lived Life section above. Therefore, it has been shortened for ease of reading:

I think one of my very first memories I have that I can remember my Nan when I was about seven, seven or eight, because I was very passive when I was young and kids seemed to walk all over me. I said "It's fine! It's fine!" you know, but my Nan turned around and said that "you'll never amount to

anything”, and that always stuck in my head, because I really got on with her, and spent a lot of time with her. You know what it’s like, someone that’s important to you, it’s a big thing, you know? But, you know, I had lots of friends at my primary school, but my brother, he was trouble. He’d get himself expelled from secondary school, he was a little bit older than me. So he’d have to move, so when he moved school, I had to go to his school. The reason behind that is that I had a thing called encephalitis...and I was out of school for six to eight weeks and I was in a coma for like a week at least, so pretty much because of my medical condition at the time, I had to go wherever my brother was so I left all my friends behind, and that was a shame, because I had lots of friends in them days. (lines: 16-30)

My brother was kind of as I say, he was the aggressive type, pretty violent, and he would attack my Mum my Dad, my Uncle, me, you know. I remember times when he smacked broom handles over my arm, they’ve actually snapped on my arm you know. He pinned up my Uncle against a wall. He was not a nice guy. Very short tempered, and he’d be almost like “yesss, I did that, I’m special”. (lines: 32-34)

So life got a bit difficult, my dad was always working, you know he had three jobs, just to keep the family going and Mum was helping the RSPCA but she always over did it sort of thing, so at some point we had like three cats with kittens and dogs and at one point we had something like 60 animals in the house which was a bit extreme and she was a REALLY heavy smoker, so you can imagine the hassle I had at school when I’d go in covered in fur and stinking of smoke, but you know, you just put up with it, ‘cos bullying in them days was bullying ((clears throat)). (lines: 36-41)

Adam describes his childhood as difficult on times. One of his first memories is of his Nan telling him he would not “amount to anything.” His brother, as will be highlighted throughout the sections, was *trouble*. The thread running throughout the narrative relates to violence; where physical and mental abuse happens in the relationships he has with those close to him. Adam relates to his character as passive in the face of abuse. Adam is brought up in inner city London in the 1970s and ’80s and this was, in his own words, a violent and unnerving place. His mother and father were not abusive towards him but were not as protective as he would have liked. Living in this type of social space and identifying as passive is a leading theme across the sections of his story. As he moves from these environments to a more peaceful and supportive place in his Dads’ Group in South Wales, it is this passivity and his insistence to keep learning and improving under extreme pressures results in a positive outcomes for Adam

## Social Spaces: Cos bullying in them days was bullying

Adam's social spaces, both inside and outside of the home, have been fraught with aggression and violence. These terms are used in related literature interchangeably, but in general, aggression is used to denote behaviour that would harm a person, and violence is a physical act (Caffare and Conn-Caffaro, 2014). Inside in the confines of close relational ties, Adam's mother was seen to prefer the animals to her children and husband. His brother was violent. His relationships with his first older love led to an accusation of sexual assault on a minor. His subsequent relationships ranged from being ignored and cheated on, to being physically and emotionally abused. From a very young age, Adam's social spaces were subject to experiences where he was unable to protect himself. Adam tries to explain the reasons for these behaviours and experiences as him being passive (see Self-Positioning), but the subsequent narratives tell a story of living in unhealthy and difficult social spaces:

We were actually playing cards I think at the table or doing a puzzle...it was cards or puzzle and he was ((brother))...he just snaps so quickly and I think he went for my dad, and I stepped in to help my dad and turned around and hit me with a broom. 'Just snapped the handle over my arms, you know, was solid wood, and all I got was just a nasty welt, but it could have been worse. I mean, he used to get drunk and when he was a bit older, this drunk guy came up to him at a kebab shop. You see, he told me this. He waited for him outside; got his crowbar, beat the crap out of him when he came outside... I remember my dad stepping in because, my brother was going to do something to Mum and I think he was about fourteen at the time, he forced him to the wall, and was holding him, and he was trying to swing punches at his head, and I stepped in. I think twelve at the time, I grabbed his arm, he turned around, the broom was on the wall, and he just turned around grabbed it, whacked it. He didn't think twice, just did it, so... and the thing that really frustrates me is he just gets away with it every single time. They tell him off he goes up he would do it again the next day, I mean... (lines: 278-293)

My Mum, wasn't the best of mums, she was very you know, if it came to being in the house, the kids, or the animals, my dad and the kids would have gone (lines: 261-263)...

She didn't want to do this, she didn't want to do that, but she'd go out and socialise, and she'd leave my dad at home...but she was actually having an affair ...my mother's having an affair with this other guy. (lines: 468-471)

Similar to Tomas' story, the effect of not having a mother figure present and protective was difficult for Adam. At home, arguments and learning boundaries are common in sibling relationships. However, inter-sibling violence (ISV) is sometimes overlooked as part and parcel of family life (Khan and Rogers, 2015; Krienert and Walsh, 2011.). It is argued that ISV has been ignored as a major contributor to social and emotional development for some time, as most research concentrates on the impacts of violence in parent-child relationships (Caffare and Conn-Caffaro, 2014). Sibling relationships are often one of the first and most intimate relationships for a child and these become a large part of a child's life and social experience (Dunn and Kendrick, 1982). If these experiences are painful and unjust, then this leads to a number of issues including trauma (Weihe, 1990; Finkelhor, *et al.*, 2015), loss of self-esteem (Graham-Bermann, *et al.*, 1994), anxiety, and depression (Stocker, *et al.*, 2002). Normalising continuous sibling violence (Khan and Rogers, 2015), such as allowing it to happen in Adam's narrative, would have had a profound effect on his well-being and ability to develop positive identity capital. His brother was now stronger than his father, and his mother preferred the animals anyway. His older brother should have played a role in nurturing Adam from problems in society; instead, he became the perpetrator of a lot of the torment that Adam faced. Also, there was no protection from his family. His brother was allowed to *get away with it* without any retribution:

He got away with it every time, doesn't matter who he'd attack. Police was never involved, it was kept in the family and so most people in the family don't even know or those who are left don't even know about it... he'd get told off, he'd go up to his room, play his music, it was if, "ohh! I got away with this again". So he'd do it again, and again, and again. (lines: 295-298)

Outside of the home is no better. Even his grandmother, a person he respected, let him down. She felt Adam was weak in dealing with playground bullies. He was bullied in school because his mum was a heavy smoker and incessant animal carer. This bullying was seen as real bullying *cos bullying in them days was bullying* (line: 40), possibly a reference to how much more aware we are of problems related to bullying in the present day (GovUK, 2019). This was exacerbated when Adam is taken away from his friends and put in the care of his



abusive brother. He moved around schools because of his brother's behaviour and became isolated from forming potential friendships. Unfortunately, he experiences abusive relationships throughout his adult life.

As a 21-year-old young man, he meets an older woman, and he is hated by her older children who were fourteen, sixteen, and seventeen at the time. Adam states story that they were violent and aggressive within their community and with their mother. They later accused Adam of indecent assault:

... we were, yeah, we were OK, it was a nice relationship, I was working, and it was in a place called Brixton which, in the eighties, like, the Police didn't like to go near. Very, very aggressive, very horrible area, and you just had to merge in with the groups, or be out on your own. But, you know, people would do or say whatever they wanted to get their own agenda, and they did, and you know. It wasn't just about me that the kids said something about, they said it about a couple of other people as well, the only difference was, I warned them off before, like th-th-their saying this, and I nipped it in the bud, rather than like it being overheard and going to the police, so... (lines: 316-321).

Adam has not only had the experience of violence within the home but also in the communities and close social spaces that he lives within as a young man. Community Violence Exposure (CVE) can be described as the hearing about, victimisation and witnessing of violent acts in the community (McDonald, *et al.*, 2011). This does not have to be in vast inner-city landscapes like in London. Even in Wales, physical violence is seen as more pronounced in areas of most disadvantage (Jones, *et al.*, 2011). However, studies do not consider the impacts of CVE on adults. Rather, they tend to focus on the impacts of CVE on children (Kersten, *et al.*, 2017; McDonald, *et al.*, 2011; Margolin and Gordis, 2004; Kennedy and Caballo, 2016). Interestingly, Adam's narrative describes young people being the perpetrators of CVE. Adam also talks about having to fit into the community environment, and, possibly, a way of parenting as a step-parent. Step-parenting, especially being a step-father can be fraught with relational difficulties (Hofferth, *et al.*, 2002; King, 2006; Coleman,

*et al.*, 2001; Ganong, *et al.*, 2011). This issue is compounded by Adam's age at the time, as he was probably closer to the age of his partner's older children than he was to that of his partner. Adam tries to take control of the spread of false accusations, by *warning them off*. This backfires because he then becomes the victim of such allegations. This narrative happens in an environment where people are self-serving, possibly thinking only of their own survival in CVE and *having their own agenda*. It is then difficult for Adam to show any resistance to the issues around him.

People around him seem to construct their own identity capital by fabricating the identity of others. This behaviour represents a stealing of identity capital to help *their own agenda*, leaving the other person without the resources to fight back. In the same way as CVE, there is an element of victimisation in the 'premeditated determination to direct allegations at an entirely innocent person' (Campbell, 2011, p. 164). It could be suggested that this is a community vendetta, and could possibly be linked to CVE, although there is little research connecting the two issues. In Hoyle *et al.*'s (2015) work there is a contribution to the narratives of those unjustly accused, but this does not make connections with CVE or disadvantaged areas. It also shows how vulnerable men are in situations where there are allegations of sexual misconduct towards a child.

A small minority of young people may lie and make fabricated claims. This may be because they feel as if they have had a chaotic life, or/and adults around them have mistreated them (Hoyle, *et al.*, 2015; Webster, 2005), which is also indicative of CVE. However, for the accused, Adam, this has devastating effects which permeate throughout the course of his life. These allegations would have also been made in an era of feverent media interest in sexual abuse claims in the UK late 1980s and early 1990s. The focus was on institutional and organised cases, which catapulted the sexual abuse of children to the forefront in the media (Salter, 2017; Webster, 2005). This was then underpinned by child protection discourse (CPD) rather than a false allegation discourse (FAD) when dealing with possible abusers (Naughton, 2019). Reporting on children's sexual abuse rose by 300 per cent between 1985 and 1987 and became part of a drama series' such as *Brookside* (Channel 4) (Kitzinger, 2004). It could

be argued that society as a whole was starting to wake up to the fact that sexual abuse of children existed within society. However, there was concern that media reports sensationalised abuse and created personal attacks on people that were associated with child abuse inquiries, and those who were misidentified (Powell and Scanlon, 2014; Cross, 2005). Additionally, the elements of CVE, maliciousness, and the emergence of public consciousness of child sexual abuse may have led to a boiling pot of tension that created catastrophic consequences for Adam.

#### The Positioning of Others: *The nail in the coffin*

She was the one that said I would never amount to anything. I did spend so much time with her [my Nan]. I've always remembered, never forgotten. It hurts today and ...it always gives me that horrible feeling...I'd just come out of school and there was a couple of kids they were playing. They were...probably were being a bit mean. But, I said "ahh, don't worry about it" She [my Nan] was talking to some parents, and when I said "oh don't worry about it", that's when she bent down and she says "Man, you're never going to amount to anything"...and I just went quiet and in on myself. I've only ever felt like that once maybe twice in my life (line: 243-254)

It feels as if Adam's identity capital was compromised from the moment he realised he did not act as aggressively as the people in his immediate environment. It was expected of him to stand up for himself. He lived in a background of communities that needed to show toughness to survive. If he would not stand up for himself, then he would be seen as someone that could be walked over. As (Cassino, 2017, p. 49) states: 'masculinity is earned, often through trials or rituals, and can be lost if a man fails to live up to the demands of his gender'. This also contrasts with Tomas' narrative of a nurturing and protective response from grandparents. This seems to have been the starting point of Adam's inability to construct positive identity capital because of the positioning of others. He was unable to live up to the demands of the socially constructed view of masculinity in his culture. He may well have been seen as a pushover, or someone that could be used to further another person's agenda.

In one way, not being able to meet the demands of an aggressive, violent, and gendered role sealed his fate in terms of how others would see him. Possibly people thought of him as someone they could take for granted or someone who could be abused. However, as will be explored, the *nails in the coffin* came from the continuous and insidious levels of abuse by Chandie, and a public outing of the abuse to others with undertones of his previous (false) allegation of sexual misconduct with a child. There is another observation that will be explored in this section; how people around him position him as 'other' in a way that casts him aside from others because there is always the undertone related of the false allegation throughout his closest relationships.

Nothing worked at all. I was looking for other jobs as well as the computer job, but what I would do is be the primary carer of Josh while Evelyn was working on the London Underground. She'd take all the extra overtime, so, she kept asking me to cover all the overtime, overtime, overtime. I would do less and less work, cos I couldn't do it if I was looking after the boy, and child care costs were a lot. I think we just grew apart over a period of time, and, she had that French temper, I don't have much of a temper. You know when someone starts to make you feel that small and doesn't see your point of view, and every word that comes out of your mouth is a lie, even if it isn't, you know. It's just that stage where things are pretty bad, but, we had Josh so I thought, well we'll keep ticking along, and hopefully things will sort themselves out. They didn't...When my Dad died, he left a nice inheritance, when we sold his property, and I paid off the mortgage, and about a month after that, she told me that it was over and that she'd found someone else at work. She wanted me to leave, so I'd just paid £110,000 paying off the mortgage, and her timing, she knew what she was doing. So I found somewhere up in Hometown...this is the place I found, but I had met Tamara's mum at that time. (lines: 77-95).

Adam tries to fit in with already bonded families and becomes surplus to requirements when he is not needed. When Adam tries to make a future for himself by doing something he

thinks he is good at, such as a computer business, he is asked more and more to be the child carer in his relationship, all the while his partner is having an affair at work (see Lived Life). His partner then let him pay for a house he vacates a year or so later. He rarely sees his son from this relationship and has a difficult relationship with his stepdaughter. He quickly goes into a relationship with Chandie, Tamara's mother. Chandie may have possibly sought out Adam for as a father for Billy and similarly to Tomas' story his partner, once pregnant, started to physically, and emotionally abuse him:

She had a little boy called Billy, I was a little concerned first time I met her, because I walk in and first thing he said to me is "I understand you're my new Dad". You think, Ok, that's a bit weird (laughs) I said, well, "not yet mate, we'll see how things go". It's difficult, you can't just, he was right in my face about it...I think after three months of her being pregnant, I actually found out that Social Services were involved with Billy. I didn't know before, she'd been dealt with, I met her in 2014, February, and they'd been involved with her since 2013! I only found out when I walked in to the property, and she was sitting there chatting to a lady and Chandie, that's Tamara's Mum's name, she was just not cooperating with the Social Services, she had this attitude that if I ignore them they'll go away, which I tried to explain that's not the case (lines: 101-111).

I remember her locking me in the house, and when she locked that door and put the key away, you couldn't get out without taking the door off, and the door was solid... I could never get out, so I contacted the Social Services, I didn't want to contact the Police and get her into trouble and they spoke to her, and it took her about an hour and a half to let me out (lines: 116-120).

She was kind of aggressive, and I put it down because she wasn't aggressive when she didn't have Tamara, or she wasn't pregnant. So I put it down to being THAT, but it got too much after a while so I moved down here...I kept her with money, made sure she had all the things she needed, so the kids would have everything they needed. When she was due I came down, made sure I was there, all the scans, with her when she had the baby, so she had the support and I was there afterwards...I...came up here and this was like *the nail in the coffin*. She'd been doing it over a period of time, and it just got so tiresome, getting hit, getting, you know, screamed at, she used to be able to preach at me for an hour and a half and I wouldn't have to say a word, she could just keep going (lines: 212-131).

Adam's lack of power in this situation is palpable. He tries to be a good father by staying around for his new-born daughter, but he also stays in a situation where he is shouted at and preached at, without retaliating. He tries to build identity capital through constructing a father identity by providing for Chandie and her children but this is met with hostility. In each section of his narrative, there is a point where he tries to form his own identity capital through forming relationships, but he is let down. He uses quite traditional masculine norms as resources to secure his place as a father, such as monetary support for a partner and emotional support in pre-birth (McDermott, et al., 2019). However, this does not work with someone who is unpredictable and abusive. What is interesting is his passivity in being abused for long periods of time. This positioning is in accordance with his positioning as a child and young adult. His grandmother, who he loved, thought that he would *never amount to anything* (line: 22) because he was different from other men in the community. His brother hurt him, and his family allowed the abuse to continue without retribution. He was bullied, and it was ok... *don't worry about it* (line: 252). Now he says he pays for looking after his abuser whilst she is pregnant and steps up to the mark by being present at the birth. These are all actions of a father who is trying to be present rather than absent, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

It is suggested that men do not realise that what they suffer within interpersonal relationships is classed as domestic violence. It is common for men to overlook their experiences of violence and for others to resist thinking about men as victims of domestic abuse (Zverina, et al., 2011; Dasgupta, 2002). This is in line with 'the public story' of domestic violence and abuse, which did not originate from places of power but from feminist activism (Donovan and Hester, 2015, p. 9). This is in line with a heteronormative narrative that primary power holders (men) cannot be abused by secondary power holders (women) (Dasgupta, 2002; Wallace, 2018).

In the context of domestic abuse, it is often difficult for men to see themselves as victims that may threaten their male identity (Wallace, 2018). There are feelings of shame and weakness (Tsui, et al., 2010; Machado, et al., 2016; Wallace, 2018) and an expectation that men should be able to cope with such issues in their private lives. Adam's story also shows that he is reluctant to involve the police. Although he states he would not contact the police to get

Chandie into trouble, there may be other reasons for his hesitancy. The police may see a male as the instigator of domestic abuse (Hogan, 2016), the cultural expectation of *keeping it in the family* within his life experience, or an element of distrust of the police after the sexual assault allegations which is common for victims of false allegations of sexual assault (Hoyle, *et al.*, 2015). Research also suggests that men are less likely than women to look for help through formal organisations for domestic abuse issues (Wallace, 2018; Machado, *et al.*, 2016; Ansara, 2011). In Adam's case, he only sought help because of the effects on the children rather than himself. This section follows the narrative of when Chandie moved close in Wales but would not leave his house:

This is my property, she's, you know, she's got to follow some house rules. There's no, we don't, there's no aggression in the house, there's no violence. You know, if there's gonna be any fighting you know it's like play fighting, it's really gentle, but you know, i-i-it, she wasn't acceptable, and it wasn't good for the kids, you know, seeing this. It was better that she was with the kids elsewhere, the kids seeing her, being like she was (lines: 156-161).

It is interesting that throughout Adam's narrative, help from outside agencies was not sought by his family, which would have uncovered his abuse at the hands of his brother. It was *kept in the family* and away from the scrutiny of outside agencies. This also happened in the allegations of sexual abuse, where there were no signs of retribution or challenge from Adam of the authorities, even if it was known that the children had accused others at the time. He only asks for help from social workers when he is locked in the flat as they are already involved in Chandie's life. He makes a statement that he would not have gone to the police as this may have got her into trouble. This ongoing issue of *keeping it in the family* permeates the narrative until Adam is vilified outside of the home.

*The nail in the coffin* for Adam in terms of placating Chandie was when he took Tamara swimming. The abuse was seen outside of the family, in a public place and it had references to the past allegations of sexual assault. Adam's identity capital resources as a father were being compromised around other males and this was the turning point for him at the time.

You say it takes two to argue but it doesn't. We went swimming...the baby needed to be changed. I took her into the men's changing room, and she went craazy. There was a couple of men naked in the shower, she goes barging in, and "Those men could rape this girl!" I was saying, "I'm with her!" She wouldn't leave, she would not leave at all, and she couldn't understand at all, she doesn't understand, I don't think she's got the capacity. That was like the last nail in the coffin... I knew well as friends which was very difficult for me, very embarrassing, very uncomfortable, and the fact that she didn't trust me, it, it was you know, I just couldn't put up, I couldn't put up with it anymore. It was just, it was just too much (lines: 131-139).

She went around to the neighbour and said I fancied his wife and then she went to the other neighbours and said that I was talking about his children. She was horrible, she was absolutely horrible. That's really scary isn't it you know. So, one neighbour wouldn't talk to me, the other one left (lines: 151-154)

It seems that Chandie uses Adam's previous allegation of sexual assault on minor to control him. Her reasons for this are not clear; there is an unconscious element of tension in the swimming pool changing rooms and a conscious maliciousness in telling Adam's neighbours when things are not going well for Chandie. Adam is at risk of being an outcast in the society, which control how he is labelled. A person carrying the stigma of an abuser of children can be positioned as an 'outlaw or werewolf [in] the zone of lawlessness' (Spencer, 2009, p. 222; Agamben, 1998). Being labelled by a community as a paedophile is one of the worst identities a person can have in a society that reveres children and can have dire consequences for the accused including a threat of vigilantism and lack of police protection (Hoyle, *et al.*, 2015; Morris, 2015; Bachelor, 2019).

This is a real threat to Adam's identity capital and adds to the ongoing struggle of losing identity capital in his relationships with his previous partners. To locate the story further back into his past, it is of note that Adam does not have regular contact with him because his ex-partner was ignoring him and his stepdaughter gatekeeping was his relationship with his son. In this section, he talks about a concern he had about Josh and school where he had phoned the school after trying to talk to his ex-partner and writing regularly to his stepdaughter to no



avail. The stepdaughter is seen as gatekeeping the relationship between him and his son Josh:

...‘Cos mum just ignores what I have to say, so, if I’m concerned, I’ll do what I think’s best for Josh, and she contacts, mum contacted me once, but for some reason, I think that’s she’s got some kind of view that she’s Godly. She contacted me very angrily, you know, “What are you doing?” and I’m saying you know, well I’m his father, yeah his father and every right to and she said “You have to come through us”. I’m saying this is the first time you’ve spoken to me, or ever contacted me since I’ve come to Wales, it’s almost three years now, and the only reason is, it’s because I’ve gone over your head (lines: 408-413).

This is a form of ‘othering,’ which allows a sibling to have more power to parent than his biological father. This ostracism is also not loud and shouting, like Chandie to the neighbours, but through the use of silent treatment, there is an ‘implicit...and explicit divorce’ (Williams, Forgas and von Hippel, 2005, p. 5) in his past relationships. It is as if he does not exist as a father for Josh until he is allowed by others to be one. This form of ostracism also severs the relationships of belonging, which is vitally important for identity capital to thrive and is discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

#### Self Positioning: My brain is wired differently

Throughout his narrative, Adam talks about being passive and wanting a gentler environment and fostering a gentle environment around his children. He also ponders why his brother was so violent, and wonders if he is biologically different from others in his social space:

I was very passive when I was young. Kids seemed to walk all over me, I said ‘it’s fine. It’s fine you know’ (line: 21)

Adam blames himself for not being more assertive, rather than blaming the environment in which he lived. He ponders and answers that his *brain is obviously wired differently* (line: 284) and wonders whether this is due to his encephalitis. At a point in the narrative where he

discusses a specifically violent encounter in his home, he plays down the level of aggression, stating that *it could have been worse* (line: 284). By normalising and internalising the problem and the difficulties around abuse, he blames himself. This seems to happen to Adam in his relationships. It may be that identity capital resources are not available to Adam from these close relationships, and this leads to inward blame, and a watering down of the level of abuse suffered at the hands of close relationships. Côté and Levine (2016) suggest that the combination of relational ties and low agency can leave a person open to exploitation. It may be worth noting that Adam does not seem to have any time as a single man in his story. There is always a romantic partner and a relationship in which he stays, even when it is unhappy or unhealthy. It can be suggested that Adam mirrors his father's experience of living with his mother, especially in the romantic relationship with Josh's mother, as it seems as if history repeats itself in terms of working hard and the partner having an affair:

Because my dad was a bit of a doting fool, in a way, he would do everything for her, he had three jobs, he had a heart attack at forty because he was taking on so much. He would do all the decorating for her, do the housework, the garden. She would do her bit here and there but to actually kind of have an affair, kind of like belittled the um, I don't know, belittled his abilities, you know, what he'd been doing for her. (lines: 475-479)

It is possible that adults form relationships and indeed, identities that generally mirror those they see when growing up as a child (Maccoby, 1992; Seigel and Hartzell, 2005; Shappiro, 2015; Jones and Yoshida, 2012; Cacioppo, Juan, and Monteleone 2017). Adam was close to his father, and this connection would likely impact on Adam's own identity and representation of himself like the relationship his father had with his mother. Like his father before him, Adam had strong connections with those closest to him but also a lack of agency, evidenced by the inability to become who he wanted, giving more than he got back. This left him unable to form identity capital that could enable his growth to succeed but more concerning is that it allows others' to exploit the situation.

Regarding Adam's description of himself as *passive*. It seems as if he has remained passive to what life throws at him. He eventually choses to seal his fate, put a final *nail in the coffin* by becoming more active in his response to his life with Tamara. Indeed, in Adam's life this passivity I feel was a constant since birth. It was as if he was thrown into each situation with

not much agency of his own. This is similar to Heidegger's ideas of 'thrownness' ('Geworfenheit') (Heidegger, 1996; 1987), and can be seen as a passivity before the world (Crowles, 2017), where a person is born and thrown into already moving existence and is therefore not responsible for his life chances. This resonates with a way in which Adam positions himself up until the point of being publically embarrassed by Chandie in the swimming pool and by his stepchild and biological child in the house watching abusive behaviour. This changes the direction of his life experience, where he actively changes course rather than ride the wave of existence. He starts to build an identity different from passive acceptance of situations. It can be suggested that because of the acts of humiliation and embarrassment, he realises that his identity as a protective father is being compromised. Adam stops being 'thrown.' It is as if there is a recognition that it is through others that his identity as a father can be actualised and capitalised upon. Doucet (2018) draws on the work of Goffman, (1971) and Crossley, (1995) to consider how a person's sense of self; thus their identity, can only be sustained if they are able to move through social spaces and encounters and be deemed as 'normal.' It is vital for Adam to be socially acceptable as a responsible father; therefore, Adam stops thinking there is something inherently wrong with him, that his *brain was wired differently*. For Adam, the issue becomes less of an internal malfunction and more about the need to position himself as a father in social spaces. It takes the relational to enable these kinds of resources. Adam can position himself as a father who is a protector, and a father who cares for and loves his children, but only with the acceptance of a wider audience. It is only with this acceptance that Adam can identify as a father, and this is why he makes up his mind to act with agency to enable this to happen.

However, Adam also has some conflict in the way he positions himself as a mother and father for Tamara. He talks about needing the support of the dad's worker and group facilitator to help him and struggles with the idea that he can be both parents to Tamara:

I'm pretty independent in any case, it's just there was a new environment, bringing up a five month old child was quite a surprise, I didn't think I was going to be a mum at the age of like 46/47. I'm going to have a 15 year old hormonal teenager with boyfriends when I'm 60. (lines: 599-603)

I just think that, I mean it takes two parents to make a child, and you've got different ideas. I mean a woman's brains wired up so differently to a man's brain, and men and women do different things, different activities with them, you can try to do stuff, but I could never be Tamara's mum, no matter how hard I try, you know, I might do her hair, I might do her make-up, sit down and play dollies with her, but I can't be her mum, no matter what I do. I think it's just, everyone deserves it, they can't, they don't always get it, but you do what you can to make sure they can have that, I just wish Chandie was like that, thought that way. Because, you know, if Chandie got some assistance, I would have no problems with seeing them more, but she at the moment has four contacts a year for an hour and a half, with two Social Workers, because she attacked the social worker with Tamara in her arms (lines: 646-653).

Interestingly, although Adam describes Chandie as a violent person, he still wished she would be able to be part of Tamara's life. Adam states that he will be a mother to Tamara, but that he could not replace Chandie and wishes she would change. For Adam, mothers and fathers serve separate roles in bringing up daughters and that he is unable to fulfil both because *his brain is wired differently* from a woman. I found this an issue that I also had to comprehend; being both mother and father to my own son and worrying how good I would be at football. It is suggested that 'mothers' and 'fathers' within a heterosexual partnership have specific gendered responses to parenting in a socially constructed world (Aumann, *et al.*, 2011). Dominant masculine norms, which include hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) restrict men to think of themselves in more commonly nurturing care roles, historically assigned to mothers (Petts, *et al.*, 2018; Vigil, 2012; Johnston and Swanson, 2006). The 'new male mystique' (Aumann, *et al.*, 2011) cause difficulties for men who have been used to a social construct of the father as breadwinner and provider as society moves towards encouraging men to be part of family life (Martins, *et al.*, 2014; Miller, 2011). On reflection, it seems a sad note that the beauty of enjoying brushing a child's hair is tinged with sadness. He is capable of parenting Tamara well and yet he still yearns for her to have a mother role, even wishing that a woman who had caused him so much pain could turn her life around and be a good mother to Tamara. I wondered if Adam's identity capital would be affected by a change of position on viewing himself as a father and mother with excellent parenting resources without the need of Chandie's involvement.

## The *Because Of*:

### The DBS checking system

Adam was the only person in the study who talked about the want to work. He talks about work and people around him, working more than 20 times in his interview. This may suggest that his identity is associated with working and employment. Unfortunately, the DBS record makes it difficult for Adam to be employed. His computer qualifications are out of date.

Adam describes the situation of being rejected for a job before having full time care of Tamara:

...takes about ten months and then when it comes through, it comes through with this. All the details. This, that and the other...and then they turn around and say "no". "Look, I didn't do it, it's there in black and white, I did not do it!" Don't matter. "We don't take any that's had any kind of...been to court or this that and the other"...I find it really hard to get work, and as I say, I got a job, but they were waiting on the DBS when the kid came, and I never heard from them once I'd had my DBS. (lines: 358-363)

Child sexual abuse is seen as a *criminem exceptum*, alongside rape (Burnett, 2016). These are exceptional measures put in place for these type of cases, in line with some of the problems with highlighting people working closely with children who were risks to them (Curtis, 2003). In addition, this type of crime tends to focus on believing the victim of the allegations until there is evidence to prove otherwise (Halliday, *et al.*, 2015):

"Well we've looked into your details, we don't feel that you need to be barred from working with kids and adults, elderly, and, but we're going to leave it on your DBS so that employers can choose." I don't get it. I mean, it's kind of unfair nowadays...'Cos I mean I just want to work, and the unemployment people they don't understand that, they and I try to explain that. Been to Citizen's Advice, done this, done that. You know? There's nothing they can do, it's just the way that things are, so... (lines: 347-352).

The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) was implemented in 2002, which set a way of checking for criminal backgrounds on all who work with children and vulnerable adults. This was succeeded by the DBS check-in 2012, which amalgamated the CRB and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (Gov.Uk, 2012). The enhanced section of the DBS check also highlights any previous court cases and arrests without charge. Unfortunately for Adam, this is why the allegations made over twenty years ago still keep coming up on his DBS check. Ironically, Adam has been deemed no risk in terms of social services assessment and having care of Tamara, but the DBS organisation refuses to delete the false allegation. There is an inability to gain closure on the incident (Burnett, 2016), which has a profound effect on his day to day life. Employment has been such an integral part of studies surrounding identity capital (as seen Chapter 2), that the inability to form an identity as a worker for someone like Adam would, it can be assumed, have a profound effect on the way he is able to fit into society.

### Social isolation

Not only does Adam find it difficult to find work, but he has suffered from harassment and abuse throughout his life since the allegations. Recently, Chandie's disclosure to the community about Adam's past arrest makes him vulnerable to attack. Although he now has a harassment order against Chandie and an exclusion area around his house, the impact of the allegations has created a situation where Adam has become socially isolated, relying on Dad's group for any form of social interaction.

I'm frustrated though, 'cos I've got no criminal record at all, it's just that someone fancied me out of their lives...I started getting horrible emails, texts, phone calls, threats. Exclusion orders were in place so the mum couldn't get near the house, or near the school or near the children and she broke it straight away. We have a care plan in place, but it doesn't seem to make a lot of difference...I've also had to take out a harassment order for 5 years, so she's been to court. She's been found guilty of harassment, because the stuff that she's been doing. I mean, she's been telling people how I'm sodomising the children, abusing them. I'm getting nails in the car, broken glass and you know, all those horr... because people are only getting one side of the story,

you know, because of confidentiality. I can't say anything to anyone, so this group is a godsend, because it gives me the opportunity to talk to people... I have no family except for a couple of aunts, of course they're all in their eighties, and they're all scattered around the country. (lines: 174:187)

Aside from the ongoing abuse and stress caused by Chandie, there is an acknowledgment of the risk of people finding out in his community. As discussed in the literature review, communities and social ties play a vital role in a person's identity capital. Being falsely accused of such a crime has life-changing effects on people, and it is common for those victims to become socially withdrawn (Hoyle, *et al.*, 2015) and makes Adam prone to attack. It is impossible for people in Adam's community to know the 'ontological truth' in 'he said, she said' situations (Naughton, 2019, p. 462). Also, there is the increasing awareness of child sexual abuse within communities from present-day high profile offenders such as Jimmy Saville (Davies, 2014; Smith, 2016) and inquiries into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham (Jay, 2014) and Rochdale (Moore, 2019; Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse Inquiry Panel, 2018). This environment, it can lead to a sense of empowerment for victims to step forward (Naughton, 2019), but also creates a moral panic of perceived deviants (Cross; 2005, Cohen, 2002; Becker, 1963) which in turn prevents Adam from connecting to others to increase his identity capital. These resources are not available to Adam, and causes an ever-increasing issue of social isolation (Hoyle, *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, there are health and wellbeing risks as a single father (Chiu, *et al.*, 2018). The threat to Adam's wellbeing is constant, with phone calls, threats, broken glass, and nails in the wheels of his car.

When you're taught that when you're young, when you're older, it's really hard to cry, you know? You can be really sad about things but you know you can ohh, I don't remember the last time possibly when my Dad died and that was really quick, it was just an outburst, so. Ok. (lines: 212-214)

Adam explains how difficult it is for him to express sad emotions, which was something that he was taught as a child. This mirrors terms of masculinity that Rob discusses in his narrative. Interestingly, Adam adds these few lines a throw away comment as we are finishing sub-session 1 of the interview after his telling of the story of allegations and domestic abuse. The

narrative is 91 lines long, with one interruption from me. The narrative jumps from one situation to the next; an exploration of his life from the difficulty in dealing with Chandie, her religion and mental health issues, social services and domestic abuse to the DBS check and social services, not being able to find work, further harassment from Chandie. After this, Adam says it is hard to cry. After analysing the texts, I find this a deeply moving commentary on his traumatic life. I wonder if Adam would be surprised if he knew the strength of his emotions when he was having a quick outburst and whether, in fact, he would be able to stop. I doubt that I would be able to. This internalising of emotions he states is taught as a child, a way of socialisation for men. I reflect that many people would have fallen at the first hurdle, and Adam keeps moving forward and I wonder if this inability to cry helped at all.

### *The In Spite Of:*

#### Family who stood by him

Although it can be suggested that Adam is at risk of social isolation, at the time of the allegations, Adam was supported by his family and friends:

They were there for me when I needed them because I had an exclusion order. I couldn't go up and see all my friends where I was because I wasn't allowed to go up there... they have to cover the people that are up there. So, I had to move back home so they took me in, you know, I had told them the truth you know, I told them nothing had happened and all the people around me told me nothing had happened, but they still took me to court. It was really silly, 'cos, like in two days, it was over, they didn't even give evidence. They did not give evidence but the Police did and of course, when you do DBS check it's only what they've got on the police records. (lines: 336-342)

The ability to rely on family and friends is vitally important in times of false allegations (Gambaccini, 2015; Szczepanik, 2011; Jones and Warshaw, 2011). Although his mother was distant and both parents were not able to protect him against his brother, Adam was able to



rely on his parents to give him a place to live and support him during this time. In terms of identity capital, the financial and social capital gained from the support of his family may well have enabled Adam to possess more identity capital resource at a time where his resources were scant. The relational again plays a part in the ability to carry on in a difficult time. Family resources are found to be a predictor in the formation of identity capital in young people (Yuan and Sek-yum Ngai, 2018), and this is highlighted in Adam's case as an adult. Without family support, there would be little to enable him to move forward during this time.

### Finding a place of safety to explore fatherhood identity

Adam was the only man who mentioned that Dad's group was very important to his wellbeing. Adam had a role within Dad's group. I observed it as that of a person who supported new members and organised a savings scheme. Adam had a position within the group that allowed him to form some identity as a worker which was lacking because of his inability to get a job. Dad's group is vitally important to Adam for socialisation:

...it's a godsend because it allows you to mix with people, fine not many of the people have the same outlook on life as I do, in fact, they can have some really strange opinions, and I'm thinking WOOOOW, but then that's their opinion, doesn't have to be a good one though. (lines: 583-586)

Adam especially valued the work of one Dad's group facilitator, who helped him outside of the group on a one to one basis. This was invaluable for Adam as he did not have many friends in the area at the time. However, Adam highlights the issues with funding the group that is also discussed in the literature review:

At the time it was the beginning you know and if he said he was going to do something it would be done, and it would be done quick and he'd come

around, and you know he'd literally be on call. I didn't call him, but he would be there for me, you know, and he was, he was great and like he would get me little things for the kids, like I got, he got me into the gymnastics, which he knew I couldn't afford at the time but it was just the free tickets... But, you know, outings, we'd do training, they've all stopped. I think it's budget wise or they haven't got the staff. That's what they were talking about in there, about changing the groups again, so we might lose the Dad's group for a mixed group. (lines: 589-596)

In spite of Adam bringing up Tamara on his own, he seems to still lack confidence to enact his identity capital in the community that he lives in. He is constrained to feel a link to the Dad's group. His relationship to the worker is one that provides the social capital needed, which he has lost through the deaths of his parents and his social isolation in the community.

Unfortunately for Adam, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, this narrative also shows that fathers' parenting groups in some areas are being subjected to funding constraints. There is also mention of and a turn to more parents as partners' relational work (Cowen *et al* 2018), which moves away from a gendered response to parenting.

Unfortunately for Adam (and Rob), this would not be a useful form of support.

Adam constructs his identity capital through his ability to engage in Dad's group where he played a specific work role and supported new members. He was also able to build his identity capital as a father by moving away from an area that was so entrenched in violence. Adam is lonely, but there is also hope in his story. As discussed, he gets back up after extremely traumatic events and carries on being a father to his children. His role as a father is extremely important to him because of his inability at present to form social bonds because of the allegations of his past. Interestingly, although his childhood and adolescence were fraught with issues such as how his parents kept him safe, or how his mother gave him attention, they are present in his life when he needs them the most. Although his mother dies during this time, the idea that they were present is important in the narrative as it allows him to move on from the allegations.

This chapter considers the narratives of three fathers; Tomas, Rob and Adam. The framework for its construction can be found in Figure 13, and each narrative uses elements of positionality, reflexivity and the relational in line with the requirements of the study. In Tomas' life story, identity capital is constructed through connections with his new family and reflections of his time with his grandparents that were a positive impact on him. Tomas wanted to make his children's lives better than his own, and made efforts in ensuring they would have the best birthdays with the most colourful cakes. However, his identity capital was hindered due to his relationship with his ex partner, his betrayal by family members and his experience of the court system in trying to secure access to see his first born child. Mental health crises were also part of his story, and showed how difficult it was for him to transition from the loss of his first-born son, to opening up to his wife and moving on with his life. Rob also lost a connection with his first born son, and told a life story which showed 'childish' behaviour as a young person which is described as a form of protest masculinity, and difficulties in his home life that made him feel alone. However, Rob's story also showed his decision to make changes from the cultural norms in terms of fatherhood practices, which included working practices and the place of men in his society. This influenced his decision to be a stay at home father for Nia. Adam's story also considered not having contact with his first-born, and how the effects of inter-sibling abuse and community violence exposure effected his identity capital and his relationships with others both on a personal level and as part of a wider community. His membership in Dad's group and family support during the trauma of being accused of abusing children helped Adam to be the father he wished to be. Adam's story also reflects issues relating to masculinity and highlights his worries of being good enough as a father to a child without a mother figure. The next chapter will detail further analysis of the narrative re-presentations.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter is constructed in two parts. Part 1 considers the initial question related to this study, namely *how is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?* This is answered by exploring relationships with people and society and how hegemonic fatherhood and inverse protest masculinity is evident in relation to the fathers' narratives set out in the previous chapter. Hegemonic fatherhood is seen in the fathers' experiences through a loss of contact with children from first relationships, communicates affected by violence and female-male intimate partner violence. Part 2 of this chapter focusses on reflections and observations from choosing the methodological journey and its limitations in this study. This includes the limitations of narrative inquiry, understanding the limitations of the shared context, the methodological design and analysis of the study, the level of participation of fathers in the research, using BNIVM technique and issues with the shared. It ends with questioning whether participants could see this form of interview method as a therapeutic intervention and a discussion on what may be useful in terms of boundaries before the interview starts and a brief reflection on agency in the relational. Research will always reflect the characteristics of a researcher (Gibbs, 1991). Therefore, it is worth noting my choices in terms of what to report on in this chapter. I am and should always be conscious that by considering one particular aspect of a narrative, it may close off other, similarly interesting aspects of the fathers' stories (Goodson, 2017). I am also conscious that I will have chosen aspects of the father's narratives to support the representations that I feel should be made public in line with my own interpretations of identity capital.

### PART 1: How is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?

For this study, identity capital is described as resources that are constructed by the fathers' relationships with people and society. It is forged through life experiences and relies on interdependency and interrelational actions (Gergen 2009; Burkitt, 2016; White, 2017).

Identity capital is not situated solely in the inquiry of subjective, cognitive descriptors but in the complexity of these relational resources, which has not previously been explored.

The nature of the study suggests that fatherhood in itself is a major positive resource for men (Palkovitz and Hull, 2018; Palkovitz, 2016) and therefore is a resource of identity capital for fathers. Fathers in all three stories report that their relationships with their present children have a dramatic impact on their ability to connect with people and the wider community. Rob reports healing of relationships between his immediate family, through his identity as a father, Adam has found a role in organising a savings club in the local Dad's group, and Tomas learned to trust his interdependence with his wife and children which helps him through dark times. However, as will be discussed further in this section, there have been elements of the stories that have affected the fathers' ability to construct identity capital as much as they would have liked. By reflecting on their experiences through the lens of identity capital construction, the study invites readers to question some of those elements. It also highlights an alternative viewpoint on how grand narratives are formed and offers an alternative view of fathers' experiences which form their identity capital.

One of the most important elements of the narratives lies in the support given by family when the fathers need them the most. In Tomas' case, after falling on hard times, he still turns to his mother, who he feels had not been present in his life. After a failing relationship with his son, the love shown by Sophie and the children had a significant effect on his health and his ability to construct identity capital. After pushing against his family for a long time during his young adult life, Rob finds support in his mother, sister, and father and their ability to help guide him through his identity as a father, even if he vows to do things differently. For Adam, I suspect his future would not have looked as positive without his family intervention at the time of his arrest. As described in Rob's narrative about his relationships with homeless people and sex workers, even when some relationships seem inappropriate, they can be the most important elements of a person's ability to construct identity capital that allows them some form of resource. Also, the narratives show that all relationships change.

Relationships with macro constructions in society are also interesting. There is a change in the dynamic for Rob in his value of education and schooling, and a shunning of work that he feels prevents him from being able to be the father he wishes to be. Labels and allegations have a profound effect on Adam, and although the move to Wales gives some reprieve to

him, it still follows him like a dark cloud. For Tomas, the court system prevents him from forming relationships and identity capital construction with his firstborn. Some of these issues are discussed in the section below. This study reflects that identity capital is inextricably linked to fatherhood, and fatherhood is inextricably linked to masculinity. Exploring fatherhood gives a broader understanding of the ways in which fathers construct their identity. It also examined whether resources from the relationships surrounding them help or hinder them in identity construction. Chapter 2 *The Literature Review*, highlighted that fatherhood is considered through a variety of historical, political, and theoretical lenses. It considers that historically fathers were seen as having a 'hands-off' role in their children's lives (Dermott and Miller, 2015) but it also highlighted the lack of research in the area of fatherhood prior to the 1970s (Dermott, 2008; Cannito, 2019). Interestingly, this timeframe is relevant to the study. All three fathers in the study reflect and discuss their own fathers' roles in fathering, which would have started during the 1970s onwards when the three fathers in the study were young. The grand narratives from the 1970s onwards rely on generalizations of involvement with children and relate to a 'hands-off' approach to parenting, detached from their children whilst emanating the idea of financial contribution (breadwinning) to the family unit (Dermott and Miller, 2015; Palkovitz, 2002).

In Tomas, Rob, and Adam's narratives, there is a reflection on their own father's actions during their upbringing. Although it could be considered loving in many ways, there is a sense of distance when fathering their sons. For Tomas, financial and emotional support from his father is hidden from his mother's view; Rob's father only becomes a father every weekend where there is a routine of being taken to his aunties and going to the local café. Even when Rob is displaying quite difficult behaviour as a teenager, there is little meaningful connection by Rob's father to intervene to create safety for Rob. For Adam, he is close to his father. However, it could be suggested this closeness is passive and lacks agency. There is a sense that they all feel their fathers should have been different. For Rob, his father's absence in the home and during a time where his own mother had to work extremely hard to keep a mortgage after they split up. For Tomas, there were intimate moments (Dermott, 2008), but a sense that his mother was controlling the relationship to some extent. Adam also felt this control by his mother and saw his father as lacking the protection he needed from his

abusive brother and being passive when faced with his mother's affair. If fatherhood is linked to historic hegemonic masculine identity, virility, dominance, and rigid gender roles (Dermott and Miller, 2015; Åström, 2018; Connell, 2005; Cheng, 1999), then it seems all three men's stories reflect perceptions of their own father's inability to meet such socially constructed standards. It also can be viewed from a caring masculinity perspective (Hanlon, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Hrženjak and Scambor, 2019; Scambor, *et al.*, 2014) and not constructively being able to meet this standard. The fathers in the study reflect their own fathers' experiences and related this to their interactions with others, considering their situations and temporality (Malthouse, *et al.*, 2014; Rennie, 2009; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), in an era where there seems to be a free-fall in identity capital for their fathers. There seemed to be no specific 'Truth' (Patton, 2015) in a father's identity during this time, although this may point towards multiple masculine identities (Roberts, 2012; Connell, 2005). Tomas' grandfather and father's identity related to teaching him about cars and allowing him time to potter in his garage where there is stability and a reciprocal relationship. In contrast, Rob's father's rebuffed attempt at hanging out with Rob to look at birds. In each of the father's stories, there is a narrative that their own fathers, in some ways, do not meet grand narratives of fatherhood and hegemonic masculine identities. This is present in the stories of not protecting them when young, being absent and inactive in their lives, and lacking emotional intimacy.

The fathers in the study take conscious action to become more actively involved in their children's lives and reflect on the differences between themselves and their own father's experiences. This is in line with the social and political narratives that expect fathers to be present (De Benedictis, 2012) and emotionally connected to their children (Dermott, 2008), even if they live in different houses (Dermott, 2008; Furstenberg, 2019; Norman, 2017; Lamb, 2008; Cannito, 2019). This differs from their own father's experiences. For the fathers, it seems presence and emotional intimacy with their children are extremely important. This presence goes against the socially constructed world around them, which defines men in terms of hegemonic masculinity (Cragun and Sumerau, 2017). They are also victims rather than perpetrators of aggression in relationships, they bake birthday cakes, become single parents, and full-time carers, stand in playgrounds alone, try to braid their daughter's hair. They do this against a backdrop of sometimes difficult environments; communities of

violence, inter-sibling violence, female on male domestic violence and in previous relationships where they lose contact with their first-born children. They become depressed (Rob), suicidal (Tomas), and isolated (Adam), and each tells of a difficulty in expressing emotions.

### Hegemonic fatherhood

*Hegemonic fatherhood* is a term used for this study to stipulate the ideal of fatherhood practices that many men may not achieve. It is created from an exploration of how fathers in areas of disadvantage are thought of in grand narrative and deficit models of thinking versus the neoliberal ideal of fatherhood, its policies around ideal family life and relationships, and societal norms (Sen, 1992; Norman, 2017). This includes fathers being present, attentive, and financially contributing to their children's development through employment, and being active in their upbringing. These characteristics for some men are not achievable and can create a deficit narrative of fathers who father well, but differently. Fathers would need an immense amount of identity capital resources, pulled from relationships around them to meet these ideals. The three fathers in the study report experiencing views on fatherhood that on one hand, encourages presence and involvement in their children's lives, but on the other, they report an unease in society when they express such actions.

When the fathers tried to act differently from their forefathers, such as being present (Norman, 2017; Dermott, 2008), protecting (in Adam's story), functional in family relations and caring (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012), the society around them, it seems, gets uneasy. The fathers enjoy caring for their children but experience difficulties as in the backlash for demonstrating such behaviours and actions in society. It is hard for them to reach the ideal standards set for fathers in socio-political and historical grand narratives. For example, in the narratives, Tomas is seen as a 'housewife' by his neighbors for enjoying creating birthday cakes for his children. Although he implies he does not mind the label, it highlights his difference in fathering practices in the community in which he lives. For Rob, it relates to isolation, where he stands alone in the playground, being rejected by the mothers and feels he gets a harder time from social workers when being assessed for custody of Nia. Rob also



spends a lot of time in his narrative justifying his reasons for being a stay at home dad rather than working, as if he has to defend himself from the backlash of not having a job. Adam worries about not doing his daughter's hair as well as a mother would (Hanlon, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Hrženjak and Scambor, 2019; Scambor, *et al.*, 2014).

Another issue in the three men's stories relates to their inability to express emotional states. Rob is devoid, Adam is passive and empty, and Tomas becomes quiet. Although they wish to be emotionally available for their own children, both Rob and Adam's story talks about their masculine identity and cultural history, not allowing them to be emotional. I suspect Rob and Adam also are able to connect with their emotions with their children but probably avoid doing this when society looks on. It is evidenced by Rob's reflection of never seeing a father push a pram outside when he was young. However, they are breaking away from this image, and attend Dad's groups where men do think about emotions and feelings and try and work towards better relationships with their children. There are a number of reasons in the narratives that hinder the father's ability to construct identity capital and to be able to be the fathers they wish to be. Some are highlighted below and offer some understanding of the issues faced by fathers who live in these areas. These are contributions to knowledge as I am not aware that fathers in these areas of disadvantage have articulated on the issues that have prevented them from being the fathers they want to be in this way before. These issues have hindered their identity capital as fathers.

#### Loss of contact with children from first relationships.

In all three stories, the men experienced loss in their relationships with their firstborn children. Tomas suffered a great deal from the decision to give up contact with his firstborn son Cai. He even tattooed Cai's name on his neck, possibly in an attempt to keep his fatherhood identity and connection with him. Rob was pragmatic and regretful that he did not stay in his first relationship and was thankful that another man was bringing up his child Jay. He was, however, spurred into action when realizing that his second-born daughter was adopted removing his to be a father due to his chaotic lifestyle. Adam does not say much

about his relationship with his firstborn son, but throughout his narrative, there is a feeling that he feels surplus to requirements, and not needed as a father until the present day.

Without a clear definition of fatherhood and active presence in their children's lives, the men seem to suffer in some way. Loss is evident in all three stories and affects the way the men are able to construct their identity capital. For Tomas, it is palpable. There are moments of feeling suicidal and stories of the heartbreaking decision to stop contact for Cai's sake; these feelings are only overcome by actively building a relationship of trust and communication with Sophie. Rob was shocked that his daughter was in care and that he could not do anything about it. He has to reengage with family members and build relationships to be able to care for Nia. Adam keeps his emotions locked away from the narrative, something that was taught to him as a child and he finds solace in Dad's groups, where he starts to form a more confident father identity. There is also an issue of ostracism in Tomas and Adam's narrative, where each is unable to identify as a father unless others (such as ex-partners) wish them to be involved with their children. This power imbalance may be an important element of identity capital construction. Relationships and the relational seem to be based on the ability to share power with each other rather than oppress one side of the relationship.

### Communities Affected by Violence

Community Violence Exposure (CVE) is the hearing about victimisation and witnessing of violent acts in the community (McDonald, *et al.*, 2011). Adam's story reflects a specific kind of 'community vendetta' (Campbell, 2011, p. 164), where false allegations ruin lives, and there is a high level of CVE. Active CVE happens in both micro and macro spaces in Adam's life from a young age. For example, he is not protected by his parents from inter-sibling violence (ISV) (Khan and Rogers, 2015), and then again in his relationships with his ex-partners (discussed below). For Rob, there is a sense that it is part of his identity, being put in jail for fighting, taking over the house and kicking holes in the wall. For Tom, the claim of being seen to be abusive towards his son whilst strapping him into the car and being filmed was the beginning of the end for his relationship with his son. Rob is served well by his violence as his story reflects an ability to form identity capital outside of society's norms, but

this changes when he has custody of Nia. He removes himself from external violence and *bites his tongue*. CVE may have an impact on the way fathers are able to articulate their thoughts and feelings that would be contradictory to living in areas where violent acts are common. This may imply a level of self-inflicted violence and relates to the forms of depression, thoughts of suicide and isolation felt by the fathers in the study. Although Adam does not talk about such self-inflicted violence, he does say he shuts down and cannot cry, even when his narrative has a profound effect on me during the research process.

However, it seems for the three fathers to be actively involved with their children, there is a need to isolate themselves from communities affected by violence, and this can be a lonely experience as reflected in both Adam and Rob's narratives. It is interesting that both Rob and Adam have been long-timers in Dad's group, and it is as if Dad's group offers solace from the outside world. Dad's group, it seems becomes a haven for fathers where there are elements of communities affected by violence. Dominant roles of hegemonic masculinity, which include violence (Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018) can be ignored for more caring masculinities (Hanlon, 2012; Elliott, 2016; Hrženjak and Scambor, 2019; Scambor, et al., 2014). However, as suggested in the literature review, hegemonic fatherhood relies on the ability to rely on the neoliberal ideals of being a provider and breadwinner from masculine identities. However, it would also require close, expressive relationships with their children. They would also have to have the ability, space, and time to reject hegemonic masculine practices and for the people around them to allow this. Although there are arguments against the ideology of Dad's groups and parenting classes in areas of disadvantage in the literature review, for Adam especially, it seems a safe space and away from the wider community, where interdependence, support, empathy, attention, and co-responsibility (Elliott, 2016) can be celebrated.

#### Female-Male Intimate Partner Violence.

Both Tomas and Adam had experienced quite violent forms of abuse from their ex-partners, which was an unexpected disclosure for me as a researcher. Both had been physically and

emotionally abused, and Adam has also been financially abused. As described, there is a societal denial that women can abuse and a number of complexities in the understanding of the acts of female on male intimate partner violence (IPV) (Davies, 2018; Hogan, 2016; Chaudhuri, 2012). Both narratives reflect the inability of fathers to gain identity capital resources during this time. Tomas' mother betrays him and gives his son back to his ex-partner after a horrific incident where she attacked him with a knife. Even at this point, in his own family structure, it was seen that baby is better off with the mother, and there was no opportunity to flee to a refuge with his son or take time off because of work commitments. Adam discusses his ex-wife's *French temper* as an excuse for her behaviour towards him, and Chandie's incessant and deceptive abuse of Adam included being held prisoner in his own home and being punched and slapped. Both Adam and Tomas' narrative attempts to justify staying in relationships because of having the role of providers in the family unit. Reasons given were related to childcare and for finance, but this prevented them from actively being the fathers they wanted to be. In Adam's case, especially, his desire to be *present* rather than absent was the reason for his inability to leave his partner. The inability for healthy interdependence (Burkitt, 2016) in these relationships is damaging for both men and creates difficulty in constructing identity capital. It provides a difficult platform for hegemonic fatherhood, which values the presence, financial and emotional provision of their children as integral to the role of fatherhood. Hegemonic fatherhood, it could be argued, still requires a need for masculine practices that reflect hegemonic masculinity. It could be seen that fathers are less of a father if they cannot stay and provide, and less of a man for succumbing to female on male violence. These situations it seems are shameful for men, and deeply damaging to their identity capital resources.

### Inverse Protest Masculinity and Fatherhood

'Masculinity is earned, often through trials or rituals, and can be lost if a man fails to live up to the demands of his gender'. (Cassino, 2017, p. 49)

This thesis contributes to knowledge by defining a new concept called *inverse protest masculinity*. Inverse protest masculinity is defined as the proverbial middle finger to neoliberal constructs and societal expectations of fathers in areas of disadvantage. Inverse protest masculinity celebrates the ability of fathers in the study to push against the structural forces of society and prejudgements of men living in areas of disadvantage. It shies away from the aggression and dominance of hegemonic masculinity, possibly by experiencing violence in the world around them or possibly by the mere nature of adult development where men seem to mellow with age and the arrival of children (Palkovitz, 2002). Inverse protest masculinity precedes protest masculinity where men make a claim 'to power where there is no real resources for power' (Connell, 1995, p. 111) through anti-social behaviour. Here there is no societal consent and very little coercion in terms of hegemony (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) because fathers seem to be writing their own rule book. This type of anti-antisocial behaviour is now defined as a push against the societal grand narratives of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. These narratives include those of 'of familial disorder and dysfunction, (and) dangerous masculinities' that created 'moral decay' (Skeggs and Loveday, 2012, p. 424). These fathers are not disordered or dysfunctional in their relationships with their children, and push against the issues of 'moral decay'. For example, perhaps 'moral decay', remains not with fathers who choose not to work, but within the structural macro relationships of fathers and employment. The 'moral decay' it can be argued rests with the type and quality of work fathers would be able to access. As is explained in Chapter 2, zero-hour contracts, volunteering, low paid manual, and menial work, quality of support within the workplace, length of trial period can make fathers worse off for taking short term contract jobs (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014; Guy, 2013).

As discussed previously, fathers in this study have saw their own father's powerlessness and lacking identity capital through the inability to construct their own identities as fathers they may have wished to be. Although not entirely anti-social in terms of protest, Tomas defeats a number of odds which could have seen him fall into many grand narratives of an emotionless, detached father (Schmitz, 2016). Tomas is completely present in Zac and Levi's life and fully engaged with Sophie. There are no secrets, and there is a reciprocity in their relationship where love, support, and kindness do not need to be hidden from Sophie. He is in confluence with others around him (Gergen, 2009) and finds his identity capital resources within these

relationships. Tomas does not work, and for now, this is okay, because Sophie is taking the lead. This, I feel, would not be forever, and I have no doubt that cars will figure quite closely in his future occupation. This is a protest, and a push against the identity he could have taken should he have stayed quiet and withdrawn. The protest is the multi-coloured cake, the wild camping the plethora of animals, and the acceptance of a happy life in the face of adversity.

For Rob, there are many middle finger experiences. The most obvious is the glaring insistence of his push back on the 'malestream' (O'Brien, 1981) that fatherhood is a social set of practices that should mirror traditional masculine practices of provider and protector (Tronto, 2013). Providing and protecting his daughter looks different from the traditional narrative. Being able to make choices for Rob is important to his survival. He is adamant that he will not work to death like his father. He is all too aware that provider status does not provide a fulfilling fatherhood role (Shirani, *et al.*, 2012). He believes that the care for his children will be more beneficial to him than the workplace as they could look after him when he is older. It makes more sense to Rob to invest in his relationships with his children rather than work a dead-end job that is too hard and would waste too much time. For Rob, money is merely a piece of paper, but relationships last. Being a single parent has also allowed Rob the freedom to construct his idea of fatherhood in a way that suits him. This may have been different if he had a partner or if Nia's mother was still a part of her life. He believes Nia can be what she wants to be and her education is very important to him. He educates Nia on the stars and space and pushes her further than what he believes the school could teach her. He believes that his own learning and development come from his relationship with Nia and not from the wider society or community, and this is an investment he is eager to make.

Adam may portray a more passive character than Rob and Tomas but shows that he will not give up on caring for his children. It is Adam's passivity that contradicts the ideas of protest masculinity. Adam's narrative may be seen as closely related to the concept of caring masculinities (Scambor, *et al.*, 2014; Tronto, 2013). However, Adam's narrative does not reflect a rejection of dominant hegemonic masculinity (Elliott, 2016) because this does not fit with his own character. He may feel sad that he cannot be a mother to his children, but he does keep going in the face of significant CVE, including threats to his well being, crank phone calls, threats, broken glass, and nails in the wheels of his car. For Adam, being accepted and being part of a Dad's group counteracts the community-based violence he faces, Being non-

violent and caring for his children highlights the anti-social behaviours of communities rather than the anti-social behaviour of specific fathers within them.

As discussed in the literature review, although 'new fatherhood' is a political, practice and linguistic shift (Dermott and Miller, 2015), it can be argued that it is difficult to conceptualize what was 'new' about it and how far the ideology of 'new fatherhood' has come (Dermott, 2008; Gregory and Milner, 2011). This study offers a contribution to knowledge from the perspective of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage, and how their identity capital is mediated by their life experiences. What is 'new' about fatherhood for the three fathers is the element of inverse protest masculinity, a way of pushing against the preconceived 'grand narrative' ideas of fathers, and this study shows how they are carving their path and journey through the focus on identity capital. For the fathers, identity capital is constructed in a number of ways. When relationships are fragmented and difficult, it impacts on the resources available to all three fathers in the study. As discussed, the fathers in the study are hindered in constructing their identity capital through the loss of relationships with their children from previous relationships, living in communities that are prone to community violence exposure, and female on male domestic abuse. They reflect on their own fathers' lack of power to achieve hegemonic masculine identity as well as being able to define a father identity that fits with a view of fatherhood in disadvantaged areas. This study offers this new perspective for the first time and evidences how these fathers visibly construct their identities as fathers in ways that go against a number of pre-judgements and deficit model thinking in these areas.

## [PART 2: Reflections from the methodological journey](#)

This section is a general discussion on the limitations of using my choice of narrative inquiry, and moves on to some of the issues related to methodological design and analysis. Using BNIVM as a technique made me question whether I was giving credit where it was due in terms of researchers who founded the original technique, and it looks at whether being an 'insider' who knew and lived in similar communities could itself be a barrier to overcome as a researcher. Finally, this section also considers how the research interview especially could be considered a type of therapy and how thinking about and discussing with participants about the similarities may be useful before the start of the interview.

## Limitations of Narrative inquiry in this study

Narrative inquiry was a useful method and methodology for this study, however all research methodologies have their limitations. It is emergent in design, which can be useful for researchers who like to follow issues that are highlighted in narratives, but this can prove difficult on times such as knowing when to have the confidence to follow unknown paths and difficult issues for the researcher. I believe it takes a certain 'guts' to allow a narrative to unfold without ridged direction and a lot of trust in the process itself, as well as admitting that you would like to go back to universities' Ethics Committee and make substantial changes. It was also going to make piloting the research process difficult and time consuming, as there is no reassurance that the design agreed after the pilot would be suited to the chosen research design and delivery. However, I believe in retrospect that the questions around research relationships with the participant could have been explored in more depth and judgments around participator roles throughout the research process may have been better highlighted and discussed at this point.

One of the limitations to both interviews and subsequent analytical framework of the study is that it takes a long time, with a small sample size, and may be thought of as indulgent by other researchers or its sponsors. This is worth considering when choosing this method of narrative inquiry. Once I had chosen to research life stories it was also difficult to concentrate on one point of time which may have proved more fruitful in different circumstances. For example, by changing the initial question (The SQUIN) to something more focused, like "tell me about your life experience as a father..." rather than the "tell me about your life experiences..." SQUIN question, could have provided more focus. Other considerations and limitations can be seen in the following headings. These include deeper look at some of the limitations of to the methodological design and analysis, the use of BNIVM and levels of participation.



## The limitations of the shared understanding of context

In Chapter 4, I discuss the issues around positionality and voice in research. I highlighted that I was an insider as well as an outsider (Merton, 1972, see also Olive, 2014) to the father's culture and environment as I too came from an area of disadvantage very similar to theirs. There are strengths in researching in areas that a researcher knows well. Researching in similar environments afforded me, I felt, more access to the men's stories and a quicker ability to form relationships of trust. I understood the cultural language and gestures, and was able to work quickly in the pre-interview stages in establishing a researcher relationship with the men. Being an insider in this sense allowed me to be quick-witted and to hold my ground when learning lessons in research. I was able to use cultural norms and practices to ensure that the men felt comfortable around me, and to take lightly some of the things they said to me such as chatting me up for my number and see it as part of the cultural exchanges that take place in this environment. I was also an outsider too; a woman and an academic, as well as someone who had spent her career in health and social care roles. I was also aware of the grand narratives that encompassed the fathers, and the wider macro issues they faced from living in these areas.

Being familiar with the context can have its downsides. This includes 'loyalty tugs' in terms of reporting participants in a more positive way (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p. 70), and a projection of my own life story on to the issues that I felt were important to the study. On reflection, this also could also make me 'blind' to the other issues in the narratives that I may have overlooked and that may have been highlighted by other researchers or the fathers themselves. For example, I touched briefly on the father's own relationship with their fathers, but because of my lack of understanding and experience of such relationships, I may have not chosen this area for expansion. Researchers who work alone may subconsciously be drawn to those things that they know, or are interested in which can create a blind spot. Reflecting back to Etherington's (2009) 'Checklist for legitimisation' (Figure 8), it asks whether the writer used analysis to open up the text and invite interpretative responses. I took this as inviting my own interpretations, which I stand by as a legitimate form of re-interpretation because of the way that I have been visible within the research process. However, there would have been many other re-interpretations depending on the people you would invite to help with

this part of the research. For example, using BNIM (Wengraf, 2007), for example, ensures that 'blind spots' are considered by asking other people (usually professionals) to help interpreting the narratives. Other studies across social research will be more concerned with using the participants as researchers in this way. It may have been useful to use other people to prevent 'blind spots' in the research. The purpose of this research was to explore, alone, with 'blind spots', and to completely let go of trying to search for the 'Truth'. Being open and honest about the limitations of this research is part of a way to legitimise it, and ensures that this thesis is the start of the journey rather than the end product. This will enable further research in this area, constructive discourse and new contributions.

### Methodological design and analysis

The stages of analysis were extremely helpful at the start. It was useful to find a structure which would aid be to analyse the texts. Like the interview method, very little was written about how to analyse a text in narrative inquiry that would suit this type of research. This reflects the post-modernist edge to the study itself, but without direction, it was difficult to start. I used a staged approach, taken from Riessman (2008) and Tamboukou's (2003) discussion and focussed more on the 'told', rather than the structure of the 'telling' (Riessman, 2008, p. 54; Mishler, 1995) of the story. As discussed previously the use of TQs, for example, are useful to scan interviews for salient points, and at the analysis stage they can be used to look for further information and knowledge to answer the CRQ. This means that it is possible that TQ's change over time as the research expands and goes on its own journey with the researcher holding on for dear life. In conclusion, the message is, that things change, and narrative research is not a linear approach that can be set out in different stages that follow on from one another in order. It hops and weaves in and out of analysis, literature reviews, reflexivity, change of philosophical meanings, and complexities throughout the research journey.

Where using subheadings helped at the start of the analysis (see Figure 8), it became quite restricting. I reflected that when I 'loosened up' as I become more competent, new ideas come into play. By adapting Wengraf's BNIM (2004), I became more creative in the way I thought about the research. For example, I wished I could have spent more time with the fathers and used photographs, art, and/or technology to enhance the told stories. There may have been more use of co-production with fathers, and this possibly would have meant a completely different interpretation of stories. Some of these choices are reliant on the bravery of the researcher to try something a little different. However, a researcher only has the tools, experience, and allocated time at their disposal. This is a word of encouragement to researchers who use BNIM as a methodology in the future who may be encouraged by my journey to try alternative creative methodologies.

I was conscious that by designing a framework for narrative re-presentation of identity capital and sticking to the subheadings in the analytical framework, I might have fallen on my own sword. The words used in the analytical framework had their own limitations. Words such as *Because Of* and *In Spite Of*, and '*help or hinder*' gave a sense of duality that I was paradoxically trying to back away from at the start of the study. Structuring the framework like this, can be seen as deterministic and automated and underestimates the grey, (or in Tomas' case, multi-colouredness) in between such states. I questioned whether my framework was any different from the 1-10 scales that I wanted to erase from practice. This type of polarity can create a level of simplification and monologous explanation that may not be part of the story itself (Baldwin, 2016). As described in Chapter 2, there is a preoccupation with pathological views of people living in areas of disadvantage. Also the ways in which people are perceived as having mediating factors and coping mechanisms that are inadequate (Titterton, 1992). I was conscious that by polarising these issues I was contributing to those pathological views. However, it can be considered human nature to categorise (Hall, 1997b), and it was done with the motivation to express important messages (Burne, 2015). Additionally, Rob's narrative did not fit neatly into those categories. A reminder, perhaps that narratives themselves are fragmented (Boje, 2008) and people are complex creatures.

Using NVIVO11 as a method for data collection management for such a small number of participants in the study may not be as useful as was thought at the start of the study. I believe it is good practice if using it as a baseline for further research but may not have been needed, and been better substituted for highlighting specific texts in the story. Also, I found it useful to read the texts as I was listening to the dialogue, as this gave more support to my interpretations than just looking at the text. Sometimes, I needed to 'feel' the text on paper and hear the words. Using a social constructionist approach to the study also meant that thematic analysis went deeper than mere cross-comparisons and required more creativity than I felt could be seen through a CAQDA system. Meanings are sometimes not codable, and using CAQDA system can mean an over-reliance on metrification (Sapat *et al*, 2017). It can also create a detachment between the researcher and their data (Goble *et al*, 2012), which I felt during the analysis stage because of the over-reliance on a computer to 'see' the data rather than 'feel' it. For example, if I deleted a quote from a narrative when looking for themes along with three narratives, it felt as if I lost a thread on the whole narrative of that story, rather than just the quote.

#### The level of participation by fathers in the research

My rationale for giving accounts written from the father's stories to them to read at the end of my re-interpretation of them is evident in Chapter 4, Stage 5. I asked them to read the section and asked them to comment. Luckily, there were no issues with the content of any of their stories and they were happy with the outcome their responses. However, it may have been useful to have spent some time in discussing this face-to face with the fathers and asked for their comments on certain aspects that I had highlighted.

There were some decisions made around how much of an input the fathers had in the re-interpretation of their narratives that I feel need to be explored further. At the starting point of my research journey, I relied on an idea that this research would mean that questions would be asked and that I would then interpret the data alone. I admit to not thinking that this could be a participatory exercise. However, as I looked in to narrative inquiry, I noticed that some (but not all; see Josselson, 2011) studies where there was participation and co-

construction throughout the research process. Doing this could be seen as doing research *with*, rather than *on* participants (Hammersley, 2014), and would prevent some seeing it as a 'data grab' by researchers (Tollich, 2017). However, I argue that not involving the fathers in the process of analysing and re-interpreting their stories does not mean that the research is not legitimate. There is sufficient reflexivity throughout the methodological process for a reader to make their own judgements about the end product of the re-presented narratives (Etherington, 2009). There is also a thorough discussion and diagram (Figure 6) on re-presentations in the research process which shows that there are multiple ways in which the father's narrative and the research as a whole will be re-presented at different points in time, by different people, and which would happen with or without involvement from the fathers themselves. I ensured that discussions around 'Truth' were considered throughout. My purpose from the start was for me to explore the narratives of the fathers. Asking them to be part of the processes would have possibly meant a very different study design and purpose. On a practical level, asking fathers to be part of the entire methodological process is very different to asking them to answer a few questions, read, and comment on the outcome of my findings. It may have been difficult for me to have asked the men to do this as they were helping me by giving up their time in fathers group, and they may have needed to be there. There is also the issue of the time taken from interview to analysis and write up which took a year. The fathers could have moved on from group, been in crisis, and may not have wanted to be involved in such an in-depth study. There may also have been a high level of drop out during this time.

### Using BNivM interview technique

I experienced uncertainty in my research journey related to whether I was able to find and use interview techniques that worked and that were seen as of good quality in social research. Wengraf's (2004) biographical interview method as part of BNIM was one of the only methods that was visible during my search. This was itself taken from Rosenthal's work (1993, 1998, 2005), who took their inspiration from Schütze (1977) which was an unpublished manuscript in German, and lacked translation. Therefore, trying to find the original ideas and technique

was like trying to find the end of a rainbow. I found Rosenthal's work was quite open to interpretation and would prove difficult for a researcher. Wengraf (2004) brings the interview technique alive and rightfully needs to be credited with sharing it. I find it quite difficult to be critical of someone's life work in general, and I found it difficult to critique Wengraf's work having met them and communicating with them prior and during a five day BNIM course that Wengraf facilitated in 2017. Wengraf was an exceptional host and extremely knowledgeable on the BNIM method. However, the training highlighted that I did not want to and could not use BNIM as a whole method as it did not work with my philosophical framework for the study. I chose to use the interview method as I found this an extremely valuable way to discuss father's experiences of identity capital without mining for specific nuggets of information I felt were important (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). There were however elements of the interview method directed by Wengraf that I found complicated and lacked malleability. This related to the absolute prescriptive way of asking questions, the idea that I had to remain objective (which to me meant being distant to the participant), and having to use a specific way of taking notes during interviews. Additionally, some may find the interview technique too prescriptive and process-driven. The SQUIN question for example, must be thought about rigorously and questions must be constructed using the BNIM Notepad (Wengraf, 2017) which contained a diagram to help interviewers (Appendix 7). Understandably, diagrams can be challenging to design but I did find this difficult to follow and did not understand the purpose of using different fonts. I found this hard to interpret. There also seemed to be words used throughout which made the act (or art) of interviewing, for me, more technical than it needed to be. Using words used such as "Sensory Scenic Reconstruction" could have been simplified using terms such as "Feelings and/in Place". This may well have been a matter of personal learning style and many years' experience of working in support roles that made me want to leave what I felt were jargon words for a simplistic description. I also understand that some researchers may need scientific, technical language to allow them to feel comfortable, or even justify their choice of methods. However, I felt the construction of the method for choosing and building questions could have been made it more accessible to a general audience. It is arguably an ideal interview method for practitioners who work in social care and people facing support services. However, the over use of technical jargon and the insistence on 'doing' research a certain way, may exclude researchers who would be able to contribute greatly to our knowledge and understanding of people and experience.

I also reflected on the objectivity needed using this method. As stated in Chapter 4, Stage 3, Wengraf (2017), cautioned on the meeting of participants and self-disclosing, to steer the conversations to just a nod or a mumble, and although actively listening, in practice, this shuts down conversation. This attempt at objectivity pushes against the relational, and I believe goes against the three-dimensional space of a narrative which includes the researcher as part of the narrative space that needs to be considered in this research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It also places the researcher as an inactive participant and disables the ongoing reflexivity related to complexity in research relationships and researcher positionality (Malthouse *et al.*, 2014). I feel this level of sitting outside of the space could hinder participants' narrative contributions. As discussed previously, it was important to Rob to challenge my world views, understand who I was, and trust me to interpret his story and I am unsure this would have happened without building some kind of relationship before the interview started. The final point is more of a stylistic issue. The taking of notes in Wengraf's (2004; 2017) work needed to be indented and indexed in a very rigid way. I found this style of notetaking was not needed and was confusing for me. Had I been using the BNIM methodology and interpreting with others, then this would have been useful, but I felt it was not needed for a single researcher using just the interview method rather than BNIM.

I noted during that time spent with Wengraf that there was a rigidity to all processes related to BNIM, and rightfully so in many ways, as learning a new craft must ensure an adherence to good technique. BNIM itself should be seen as a whole method. However, I am not sure how Wengraf would feel about me taking out salient points and using them to my own means. I did sense that I annoyed him somewhat by asking questions that veered away from his construction of BNIM. As previously described, Rosenthal's (1993, 1998, 2005), descriptions of the interview technique could be seen as quite loose in its description and therefore could prove difficult for researchers to follow. On the other hand, Wengraf's (2004; 2017) direction could be observed as too rigid. Both, it is argued, seem to lie on polar ends of the 'helping researchers to use narrative interviewing techniques' spectrum. My suggestion would be that there is a middle ground and an easier form of BNIM is created with researchers and possible practitioner-researchers in mind.

## Psychoanalytical therapy or narrative inquiry?

As my confidence grew in the interview technique, I was able to relax and observe some interesting elements of the interview itself. In Tomas and Rob's story, there was a specific time when I recorded in my notes what I call the 'punchline.' For example, in Tomas' narrative, the 'black sheep of the family,' Rob's 'being childish,' and Adam's 'never amount to anything' seemed to set the scene in terms of the whole narrative context. Granted, Tomas and Adam's punchlines came in the first few sentences of their narrative, but Rob's childish behaviour was a repeated phrase that kept happening through his story. Although I am not looking for meaning by highlighting this, it is useful for a researcher to tune in to some of the words that strike as a punchline. This can help understand the context of a person's narrative and their possible choices of story. I also noticed a number of times whilst working on the pilot and in the interviews themselves that when the men recalled a particular incident that they sometimes became quite animated or changed their tone of voice. Adam especially would set out his story whilst moving his hand to denote changing his daughter in the swimming pool, changing rooms, and brushing her hair. It was as if he was reliving the moment, and his body moved whilst he recalled that particular incident. As discussed in Chapter 3, this also made me think that an in-PIN moment (in a particular incident narrative) (Wengraf, 2004), was a way to identify and record the animated responses of participants that are not captured on tape (Mishler, 1991). I considered this to be a possible indicator that the participant is in the moment, re-telling the story as they see it in detail. I reflected that these could be part of a speech community (Morgan, 2014), where the language used, the utterances, gestures, and ways of conversation, construct meaning in a certain culture and society.

These observations are similar to discussions and activities in counselling and psychotherapy, where the therapist would observe for different body language states and draw meaning from them (for example see Argyle, 2010; Fast, 1970; Friedman, 2010; Pease and Pease, 2006; Scherer, 2003; Shotter and Katz, 1999; Shapiro, 2014; 1989). Work on the use of listening for metaphors in therapeutic narratives (Repede, 2008), for example, can be



reflected in Rob's assertion of *digging his heels in*. This led to thinking that my research could be part of narrative therapy, which has its own discipline and approach (Hegarty Smith, and Hammersley, 2010; White, C. 2009; White, 2011; White and Epston, 1992; Denborough, 2012). Narrative therapy similarly seems to resist elements of grand narrative thinking of 'Truths' and pathologisation of people without power within society (Haugaard, 2015). This would have fitted well with the nature of this thesis, and this may have been a useful starting point. However, there is a difference between psychotherapeutic narrative inquiry and this study. For example, psychoanalytical approaches may look for internal motivations of the story teller, or see the conflict at the centre of the story (Dwyer and emerald, 2016). It was sometimes difficult not to psychoanalyse the stories in this way, as if they were from a psychoanalytical session (Andrews, Squire, and Tamaboukou, 2013). I had spent a number of days considering Rob's motivations for his push back on society, Adam's passivity and Tomas' depressive state, and this usually came from the point of internal psyche considerations rather than the relational and experiential aspect of the narratives. Psychosocial qualitative research does have similarities with psychoanalysis, but it is useful to clarify. Psychoanalysis could be viewed as predominantly embedded from a positivist tradition where research such as this is focussed more on a constructionist viewpoint (Holmes, 2013). This study is phenomenological in approach, where the focus is on context and the relationships in each story rather than relying on the generalizability and cross-comparison of psychoanalysis (Holmes, 2013). This study sees the researcher as an active participant in this study, whereas there is a position of neutrality and objectiveness in psychoanalysis (Leider, 1983). Also, the reason for communicating with the father in the first place relies on me needing help from them, rather than fathers seeking me for some type of free therapy (Holmes, 2013). It is also important to consider whether participants know the difference between a therapy session and research as they may bring preconceived ideas and imagined outcomes that are therapeutic. Although participation can be therapeutic, it can also leave a participant with quite difficult emotions due to revisiting the past. Although the psychotherapeutic narrative is a strand of narrative research, this study focusses more on the phenomenological approach to narrative research which respects a person's reality and experiences (Dwyer and emerald, 2016) and does not concern itself on finding the 'Truth' or in fact an answer to a problem. This is a useful discussion and can hold a number of considerations for future

practice of narrative researchers such as the way researchers position themselves and discussions that need to take place before the start of research interviews.

### Agency in the relational

As discussed in the literature review, the concept of agency comes into play in a number of discourses around fathers and disadvantage. None more so than in the grand narratives around fathers, disadvantage, and policy. Situating the concept of agency in the relational (Gergen, 2009; 2015) allowed me to explore a different perspective on the way fathers constructed their identity capital and the resources that were available to them during this time. Relationships in the narrative hold the key to the ability to gather resources of identity capital. The fly in the ointment for the conceptualisation of agency as relational came from Rob's narrative, where he seemed to choose his own path by mostly pushing against the normative forms of relationships; his parents, his school life, and his choices when he was homeless. The issue of whether Rob's choice was an internal construct was discussed in Chapter 5. However, on reflection, I was able to consider agency in the relational as a protest. This gave rise to the concept of Inverse Protest Masculinity, which I believe features in all three of the fathers' stories. Each time the fathers enacted their agency in terms of fatherhood, it would be in relation to others in their story, even when the narrative talked about pushing against others. Yes, fatherhood, in its mere description, is constructed upon a relationship with a child/young person but it also is in relation to other people in their lives. Loss of contact with their firstborn children, Community Violence Exposure (CVE), and female on male intimate partner violence were ways in which confluence (Gergen, 2015) was disrupted and caused the most damage to identity capital. Building tight bonds with their children in terms of presence, ironing out communication difficulties in relationships, and seeking support from other men allowed them to be the fathers they wished to be were two-way processes that required others to be part of a relationship. In conclusion, viewing the study through the lens of relational agency allowed me to focus on identity capital construction in a new way and to consider some of the issues fathers in the study faced in their journey for identity capital resources.

In Part 1 of this chapter here is an exploration of the initial research question of *how is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?* Through considering the relational, and how the father's narratives were analysed for help and hindrances to identity capital formation, three hindrances related to relationships between the fathers and others and the wider communities where they live. These consist of loss of contact with first – born children from previous relationships, communities affected by violence, and female on male intimate partner violence. These issues form aspects of fatherhood for the three men in the study. However, it is inverse protest masculinity, a new term constructed for this thesis, which allows a lens by which to consider the push against the societal grand narratives of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage, and offers a description of fatherhood and its practices which enable fathers be the fathers they wish to be. This is away from the aggression and dominance associated with hegemonic masculinity.

Part 2 of the chapter reflects on the methodological journey and limitations of the study. This section considered discussions around shared understanding of the context, meaning how I positioned myself and how being familiar with the men's culture and fatherhood practices may have meant that I did not pick up on certain points for analysis in the study. Discussions in this section on methodological design and analysis allowed for reflection on words used, categorisation, duality and deterministic structures and the difficulty I faced with realising that I had possibly contributed to ways of researching that had these concepts as outcomes. The section also highlighted the rationale for the level of participation of the fathers in the research process, and highlighted the need to credit BNIVM to the right people for its design. The section on psychoanalytical therapy or narrative inquiry was included to differentiate the practices, as this may be a situation that a researcher finds themselves in when working with emotive and difficult life stories. Finally, an exploration of placing agency in the relational encouraged new thinking about identity capital and relationships and gave rise to the term inverse protest masculinity, which is discussed in further detail in the next section.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions, further limitations, and recommendations for further research

This chapter considers a number of contributions to knowledge, reflects on some of the limitations of the study and contemplates future considerations for research in this area. As discussed, there is very little data collected on men in areas of disadvantage in Wales other than to see them as deficient in some way. This thesis explores how identity capital was constructed in the narrative life stories three fathers who live in areas of disadvantage in South Wales, UK. In the literature review, it is argued that grand narratives for fathers in this area tend to focus on deficit model thinking and a pathologisation of fathers within these areas. Policy tends to veer towards fathers as human capital resources, which concerns getting fathers into work and employment and supports the narrative of men as providers. Throughout this study, this grand narrative is questioned, as are the ways in which fathers in areas of disadvantage are seen as pushing back against *hegemonic fatherhood* and being the fathers they wish to be through *inverse protest masculinity*. These are discussed below and are new terms that contribute to the research of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage. This was only made possible by considering fatherhood through the lens of identity capital resources.

### Inverse Protest Masculinity

The research question of *how is identity capital constructed in the narrative life stories of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage?* Could be answered simply by elaborating on the newly created concept for this study of *inverse protest masculinity*. Inverse Protest Masculinity has been constructed in this thesis to describe how fathers push against the idea of protest masculinity, whereby young men in areas of disadvantage make ‘a claim to power where there is no real resources for power’ (Connell, 1995, p. 111). Protest masculinity is highlighted through means of violence, criminality, and drug misuse, shunning mainstream life, education, and employment. *Inverse protest masculinity*, by its mere description, flips the concept on its head. In all three of the men’s narratives, there are suggestions of Community Violence Exposure (CVE), domestic and familial abuse through violence, lack of protection,

and denial of their identities as fathers in their own right. As claimed in the previous chapter, society seems uneasy when the fathers try to claim identity capital as fathers. In their narrative life stories, they are shunned in playgrounds, prevented contact with their children; they are easy targets for false allegations made against them. To claim power, where there is no resource of power, involves gaining identity capital resources from the relationships around them. *Inverse protest masculinity* sticks the proverbial middle finger up to the prevailing discourses and shows that identity capital resources can be constructed by fathering well. This requires finding close relationships for support, but it also includes a number of decisions that affect identity capital resources. This would include the fathers not being worried about not being as good as mothers in caring for their children and educating them to do great things. It also includes willing them to be better than they were in school, making sure that no child lacking in love by making colourful birthday cakes and going on wild camping trips. Employment, here, it seems, is not the most important aspect of the fathers' identity, which is so prevalent in discourses that surround fathers in these areas. Being present for their children, keeping them away from harm by protecting them from violence and abuse, is paramount.

Using *inverse protest masculinity* as a way to describe the actions of fathers who live in areas of disadvantage may be considered limiting as it only focusses on one aspect of male identity (father) and in one context (disadvantaged areas during a specific time). The limitation of this study rests on the ironic fact that I, too, have used grand narratives related to research in masculinity to construct the idea of inverse protest masculinity. My recommendation for further research would be to consider *inverse protest masculinity* as a basis for the consideration of other aspects of male identity and in other contexts. It would also be useful to conduct research into how others view men in different communities, and how they protest when they are seen as voiceless or oppressed. Kindness without violence, presence, and protection of others may also be part of the dialogue in other areas.

## Hegemonic Fatherhood

I would also like to recommend further research on men's experiences related to 'honour[ed] ways to be a man' (Cragun and Sumerau, 2017, p. 101), and if there are connections to 'honoured ways of being a father' and the new ideas around *hegemonic fatherhood* highlighted in this study. *Hegemonic fatherhood* stipulates the ideal of fatherhood practices that many men may not achieve. This concept originated from considering how the fathers in this study reflected on their own inability to construct identity capital. This related to relationships, which may reflect the inability for fathers in other contexts to be or become fathers they wish to be. This may be in light of societal pressures to be a certain type of father, and this would be an excellent further research possibility. Fathers could be asked about the perceived ideal fatherhood practices in their environments and their perception of their ability to meet them. Studies could include areas of affluence and disadvantage and cross-cultural practices. Hegemonic fatherhood could also be useful as a way of describing some of the issues that men face in society. This may help practitioners who work with fathers and men to understand some of the pressures that men face on a day-to-day basis to follow a masculine and father ideal.

## Using identity capital as a lens

This study also contributes to knowledge through the re-development of the term identity capital. Here, identity capital is considered in the context fathers' relationships with people and society that allow them to be the fathers they wish to be. The exploration of identity capital is situated within the relational rather than subjective, individual, 'in the mind' experience, which has been traditionally led by psychosocial words and phrases that are identifying markers of *self*. This study facilitates a diverse perspective on how identity capital resources are helped and hindered by the relationships fathers have with people and society. These grand narratives include viewing fathers living in areas of disadvantage in negative terms, through deficit model thinking (Terrile, 2019; Matos, 2015) and pathologisation related to disadvantage (Crane and Heaton, 2008). This study explores how fathers constructed their identity capital, which allowed them to be the fathers they wished to be.

Focussing on relationships explored through narrative life story methodology facilitated a deep exploration of relationships with the people closest to them as well as consider how they viewed their fatherhood through the lens of social constructions around them. Much of this has been discussed in the previous chapter; however, there are a number of important aspects that need reiterating at this point:

Identity and identity capital resources are considered as changing and multidimensional. In the three fathers' narrative life stories, the fathers' identity capital resources are helped and hindered by the relationships around them, both on a micro and macro scale. Issues such as growing apart from close family, especially their own parents, might be seen as a natural developmental process. However, even in the most fraught relationships, when there are significant issues in their lives, they turn to the only people they know may be able to help. Even when they consider that their own parents are ineffectual, distant, betraying, unprotecting, or working too hard; when needed, all three fathers rely on these close relationships to be the fathers they wish to be. Close relationships, however multi-dimensional, complex, and changing, it seems, are one of the most important resources for fathers' identity capital.

The limitations of viewing identity capital in the relational rather than from another perspective can seem obvious. It can be argued that relationships mediate resources in any context, and it is quite a reasonable suggestion. However, it was useful to consider the relational as it specifically highlighted aspects of hindrances for identity capital resources for fathers. For example, when there is a breakdown of trust, it seems that fathers in this study still relied on untrustworthy or not socially acceptable relationships to gain elements of identity capital resources. The development of relationships through time and the complex relationships between people needs to be questioned further. I would recommend further research into identity capital resource accumulation and the role of relationships that may not on the surface be seen as supportive or healthy by outside observers. This may lead to some useful insights in terms of an objective understanding of relationships and how these mediate actions. For example, female on male intimate partner violence seems from the study was accepted for a while in relationships as this offered identity capital resources related to fatherhood that would have been difficult to gain outside of these relationships. As

Tomas' story tells, once outside of the relationship, there is a fear that they are not able to be the fathers they wish to be because of the real chance that they would have to walk away from their own children. This is something new to consider whilst fully understanding fatherhood practices and ways to free fathers from having to live with abusive partners to enact a father role.

During the analysis/interpretation phase of the study, I was drawn to the narratives relating to fathers and their own fathers. This was of interest to me and created its own contribution to knowledge. Because I used narrative life story methodology, it was useful to see how the fathers in the study reflected on their own father's actions during their childhood. There were issues regarding protection, being absent, and hiding affection. The fathers in the study seem to learn from their father's own experiences. This led to me to consider the macro relationships between society and fathers, and how masculine identity and societal roles impacted on their father's ability to construct their own identity capital. My recommendation for further research in this area would be to focus on the experiences of fathers and their own fathers using a narrative methodology. I was also conscious of rich information in the narratives around relationships between fathers and their own mothers, which was not the focus of this study but may provide some exciting comparisons if related to relationships and hegemonic fatherhood practices.

It would be foolish to infer a connection between the men's construction of identity capital and the difficulties experiences in living in areas of disadvantage. There seems to be no research that can be compared to men in different parts of the country, and none that seems to compare different socioeconomic statuses. This thesis also relied on a small sample of men in these areas and it may be worth considering a larger sample.

It seems as if there are changing the discourses around fatherhood and identity. For example, Rob states it was not that long ago fathers would not be seen pushing prams in the area where he lives. The construction of fatherhood, and therefore ideas around masculinity seem to be changing, and I would suggest further research to find out what fatherhood means in these areas. This could be considered using an identity capital perspective. Identity capital is



a way of considering fulfilment rather than deficit and seeks out ways in which this is apparent in fathers' lives. Where work and employment have been major driving forces for engagement with fathers in these areas, using identity capital as a lens by which to focus on fatherhood and relationships may prove fruitful. Understanding this helps us to understand how areas of disadvantage thrive and grow despite specific difficulties and despite the known issues related to living in areas of disadvantage. It would open up a dialogue where fathers could discuss aspects of their identity that up until now have remained unspoken and it would help identify where fathers may need support to enable them to be the fathers they wish to be.

### University ethics forms and ethics committees

Research students are meant to complete an ethics form as part of their University Ethical Committee agreement to commence research. However, due to the nature of narrative research, it is difficult to be completely aware of how consent would impact on the research journey itself (Tolich, 2017, Smythe and Murray 2000). Narrative inquiry, in general, is emergent in design (Bruce, *et al.*, 2016) and therefore requires contingency thinking during ethical approval. It may be that at the start of a researcher's journey, these issues are not considered, and it is easy to believe that informed consent, as described in BERA would be sufficient (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2011; 2018). As is described in Chapter 3, the narrative inquiry journey means issues of ethics and consent are constantly changing (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and may require considering other forms of consent, such as process consent (Tolich, 2017). The ethical approval form itself may not allude to some of the issues raised in narrative research. In my case, it did not prompt me to consider alternatives to informed consent. Sometimes exaggerations of risk and issues which are more relevant to other forms of research other than narrative inquiry (van den Hoonaard, 2017) can be at the forefront of the research ethics approval forms rather than prompting discussions and decisions around when to discuss interpretation and the concerns of ownership of participant stories. Although member checking was ruled out as a method for

this study, consideration was needed as to the risk of stories given to the fathers and how reading quite difficult narratives would affect them, especially after a period of time from the interview. For example, when sharing the final version of the analysis with each father, Tomas told me he had cried, and Adam said he had felt sad when reading the analysis of the narrative. This in itself could pose an ethical risk in terms of stories that may prove to be re-traumatising for participants when read a time after telling their stories (Dwyer and emerald, 2016; Flynn, 2014). I have been lucky in my career as a facilitator and family worker to realise that if “you spill the beans, you have to be prepared to clean them up.” I was able to mitigate the father’s reactions well by being empathetic and considering future-focussed dialogue. However, thinking about this at the start of the methodological journey and on the ethical approval, form would have been extremely useful to prepare for possible reactions. These issues may be something for a university to consider in its teaching of research methodology and food for thought for ethics committees and the wider academic community.

### Methodological contributions

In terms of methodological contributions, using Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNiVM) and subsequent analysis/interpretation meant that in-depth, participant-led, rich, detailed descriptions of narrative life stories were possible. BNiVM, was taken from interview method of Biographical Narrative Interpretation Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2004), which has its roots in critical realism. Although the analysis of BNIM did not correspond with the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the interview method was used as it was an effective way of eliciting narrative life stories from the fathers whilst ensuring a father led approach. This worked well but may have its limitations for researchers who like to veer off into pathways through their own questioning during the interview. It does take a considerable amount of practice to ensure that BNiVM is done effectively and to elicit particular incident narratives (PIN) (Wengraf, 2004) from the main sub-session 1 question and reply. However, I feel that it served its purpose well in this study and offered some well-needed structure to the sometimes difficult to pinpoint methods of narrative inquiry.

A subsequent contribution to knowledge lies in the way that this study openly considers the process of narrative analysis. As described in the study, it was difficult to find a specific reference advising how to analyse narratives. The stages approach led from an extract in Riessman (2008), which charted her discussion with Tamboukou's (2003) about how she analysed the narratives for her own study. Although this section may be considered as too descriptive and prescriptive for other narrative inquirers, it is worth noting that it does provide a framework for analysis that contributes to narrative inquiry research that may not have been accessible prior to the commencement of the study. Using a framework for narrative re-presentation of identity capital (Figure (Chapter 4) highlighted the positioning of self, positioning of others, and social spaces in the *Told Story*. Again, this may be too prescriptive or stagnant for some narrative inquiry researchers. I also found reflecting on positionality in the analysis difficult as I was trying to focus the study in terms of relationships and confluence (Gergen, 2009; Shotter, 2012). I wondered if by situating the spaces in this way, was pulling apart the relational aspects between each space rather than considering them as a whole, all intermingled and confluent. However, without considering different methodologies, it was difficult not to deconstruct to rebuild narratives. Further exploration of confluence within methodological choices may be worth considering, and more discussion on these issues is related to aspects of relational agency below.

Situating agency within the relational was similarly useful but could also be interpreted as a limitation of the study. As was seen in Rob's study, his decisions could be seen as internal decisions related to the concept of *self* and without relational influences. It could be argued that Rob's choices could be linked to relational confluence (Gergen, 2009; Shotter, 2012), but left me with a conceptual and philosophical dilemma in relation to the way I have situated a number of categories within the thesis. It may be thought that relational agency is a bit like sitting on the fence between the chasms of internal agency and structural agentic influences. The situational issue is also raised in the discussions around terms used to categorise identity capital in the study, which is discussed in the previous chapter. Terms such as *help* or *hinder*, or *Because Of* and *In Spite Of* which points to polarity and a binary approach to attributing meaning to the fathers' experiences. I questioned whether these polarisations were any different than using the 0-10 scales of subjective meaning related to common forms of

questioning for fathers in this area or to Côté's (2016) scales of identity capital resources. The question of "how much did it help you/ hinder you?" could be the next stage in questioning for a researcher. Additionally, during my annual review for my PhD progression, I discussed Figure 2 in this thesis, which described agentic resources as identity capital and the focus on continuity and change. I liked this diagram because I created it and enjoyed reading Bateson's (1973) work. However, one of my supervisors mentioned that life is not linear like a tightrope, and to this end neither is the way a researcher can measure identity capital through *help* or *hinder/ Because Of* or *In Spite Of*. These may well be good ways to categorise issues and concerns for identity capital resources in the research framework, but they should not be seen as a fixed system of reference (Smith, 1984), or a framework of a priori conditions (Garratt and Hodkinson, 1998). Feeling as if I had to sit on the fence between structural agency and agency that is seen as an internal construction can be dismissed in terms of relational agency as these issues are not linear constructions. They are a way of ascribing meaning to agency in a way that allows others to understand differences in meaning rather than specific a priori conditions. The next stage to further this discussion would be to consider further post (post) modernist thinking around conditions and ways that ascribe meaning that would not follow this type of categorisation. The ideas of using art, music, photography and/or other forms of media could possibly help with this. However, for now, I am a researcher who is trying to get myself understood and hopefully accepted by people who would use this research. By moving further at this point would deter from the research question, which in itself contributes to knowledge in a number of ways. As described in the previous chapter, this could be seen as a limitation of the study and had I been more relaxed (and kinder to myself) in attributing some of the issues to confluence not only within relationships but an understanding of contextual meanings; then this may have created a more rounded and different pathway to the research question. Although polarisation or categorisation are useful for researchers, they are also very restrictive and final. The way I positioned and categorised, I believe, showed a progression of novice to expert in my use of different methodological techniques. If I were to commit to the idea of this form of narrative research then I may have chosen a different pathway to re-interpret the narratives. I may have considered more co-production or adding the use of music, movement, poetry, or photography to enrich the text. This would not be to enlist a sense of reality, but to peel back the ideas of subheadings and to work with the grey or multi-coloured

parts of the narrative. This may have been more in line with the ideas of Gergen's relational confluence than of binary, polarised attributable meanings in the study. A consideration perhaps, for future research.

### Issues of consent

The final contribution relates to the academic ethical approval for research itself that is part of the research process and risk management for all universities. I envisage that some universities who have specialists in narrative inquiry would consider ethical issues for narrative inquiry research at the ethical approval stage. However, this was not the case at my university. Due to the nature of narrative research, it is difficult to be completely clear about when consent should be considered and how this would impact on the research journey itself (Tolich, 2017, Smythe and Murray 2000), but this should not stop the thinking processes before commencing the interview sessions. Process consent (Tolich, 2017), which considers consent as an active construction and subject to change is a useful way of imagining the type of consent that might be needed in narrative inquiry research. For this study, conversations with participants and re-presentation would have been useful at the start of the interview process. An agreement about when the participants see the re-presentations (if at all), and what to do if participants have emotional responses to the re-presentations, who owns the data, and issues around the right to withdraw are all considerations in narrative inquiry research. For the researcher, a plan of where re-presentations happen during the methodological process would be useful to show points in the process where the narrative is re-presented and could be subject to ethical considerations. Figure 16 (replicated below) considers these points and could provide a platform for further research and changes to ethical approval practice for universities and students.

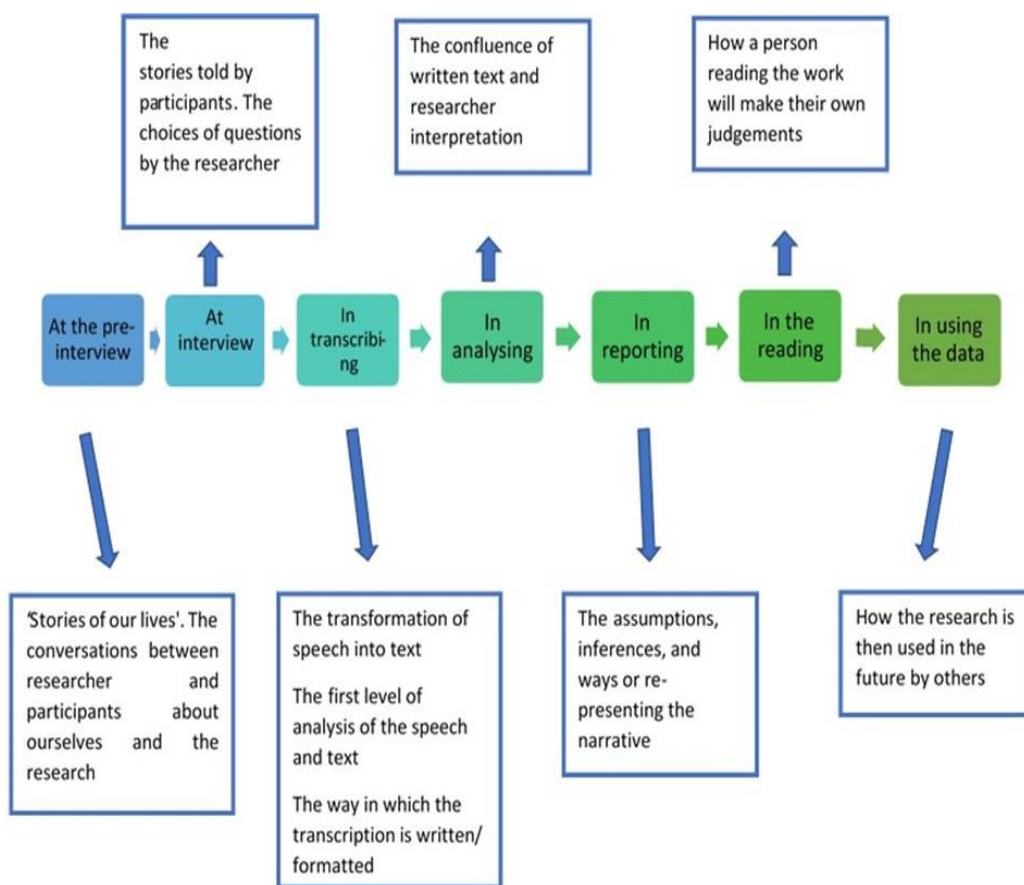


Figure 16: (same as figure 6): Re-presentations in the research process

## Concluding thoughts

To end this chapter, it is worth reflecting back to Etherington's (2009) view of what makes legitimate narrative inquiry studies (Chapter 4, figure 5) and to see if any of the issues correspond to the thesis. Firstly, I believe this study does make a substantive contribution to the understanding of social life. Focusing on fathers through an identity capital lens has enabled a fruitful study and the development of new terminologies such as *hegemonic fatherhood* and *inverse protest masculinity*. It also highlights the importance of relationships in identity capital construction and focusses on ways in which identity capital resources are

helped and hindered by such relational resources. Secondly, as suggested by Etherington (2009), I believe this research is complex enough to have aesthetic merit and additionally an analytical framework that allows a reader to see how the text is interpreted and reflexivity throughout. I stated in Chapter 1 that the research would and should pose more questions than answers. I hope that by reading the fathers' narrative life stories, that this is the case. This, I believe, encourages a greater motivation to understand the complexity of people and societies and ask questions about what it means to be human. Additionally, this study should impact a reader both emotionally and intellectually and question a reader's own perceptions of the grand narratives they hold as 'Truth' in relation to the subject matter. Information was gathered at the start of the research process and helped construct the literature review, but as the gender of participants changed and there were further opportunities to specify interesting points in the research, these were added to the main literature review. Within the main analysis of each fathers' narrative, there was also a specific literature review on relevant issues. This demonstrates that information was gathered throughout the research process and added when needed. One of the limitations of using a more traditional format to present the research, through chapters reflecting literature review, methodology, and analysis, is the concern that it is seen as a start to finish the process with a 'big reveal' at the end in the discussion and conclusion chapter. However, although this research follows a traditional format, information, data, thoughts, plans are changed, and chapters are formulated and reformulated out of sequence. Finally, Etherington (2009) states the research should make a researcher visible within the interactions with the text and research process. My reflexive accounts are dotted throughout the thesis, and aims to show how I reached my own conclusions and how I may have been influenced in doing so. Honesty is an important part of narrative inquiry research (Sikes, 2004). I hope that by showing points along the methodological journey through sections such as 'Lessons' and other ethical and procedural dilemmas, that I have shown that the process is not clear-cut but, multidimensional. It has been subject to change and opportunistic in nature (Goodson, 2017), which, it can be argued, provides a rich, interesting and thought-provoking study both in terms of research subject and research journey through narrative inquiry.

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## Appendix 1: MAPS20 Questionnaire Items

(Côté, 2016, p.67-68)

### **Self- Esteem (SE) – this is a two point scale: like me/unlike me**

SE1: I'm a lot of fun to be with

SE2: I am popular with persons of my own age

SE3 People usually follow my ideas

SE4: I'm not as nice looking as most people

SE5: Most people are better liked than I am

**Purpose in Life (LC)** - Six-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with no neutral response.

PL1: I am usually completely bored...exuberant and enthusiastic

PL2: Life to me seems always exciting...Completely routine (reverse scored).

PL3: Every day is constantly new and different...exactly the same (reverse scored).

PL4: My life is empty, filled only with despair...running over with exciting good things.

PL5: I'm a very irresponsible person...very responsible person (deleted).

**Locus of Control (LC)** – Six-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with no neutral response.

LC1: Becoming a success is a matter of hard work. Lucky breaks have little or nothing to do with it.

LC2: When I make plans I am almost certain I can make them work (deleted).

LC3: There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get.

LC4: It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.

LC5: What happens is my own doing.

**Ego Strength (ES)** - Five-point scale, from "completely false" to "completely true," with an intermediate response of "partly true and partly false.

ES1: I enjoy difficult and challenging situations.

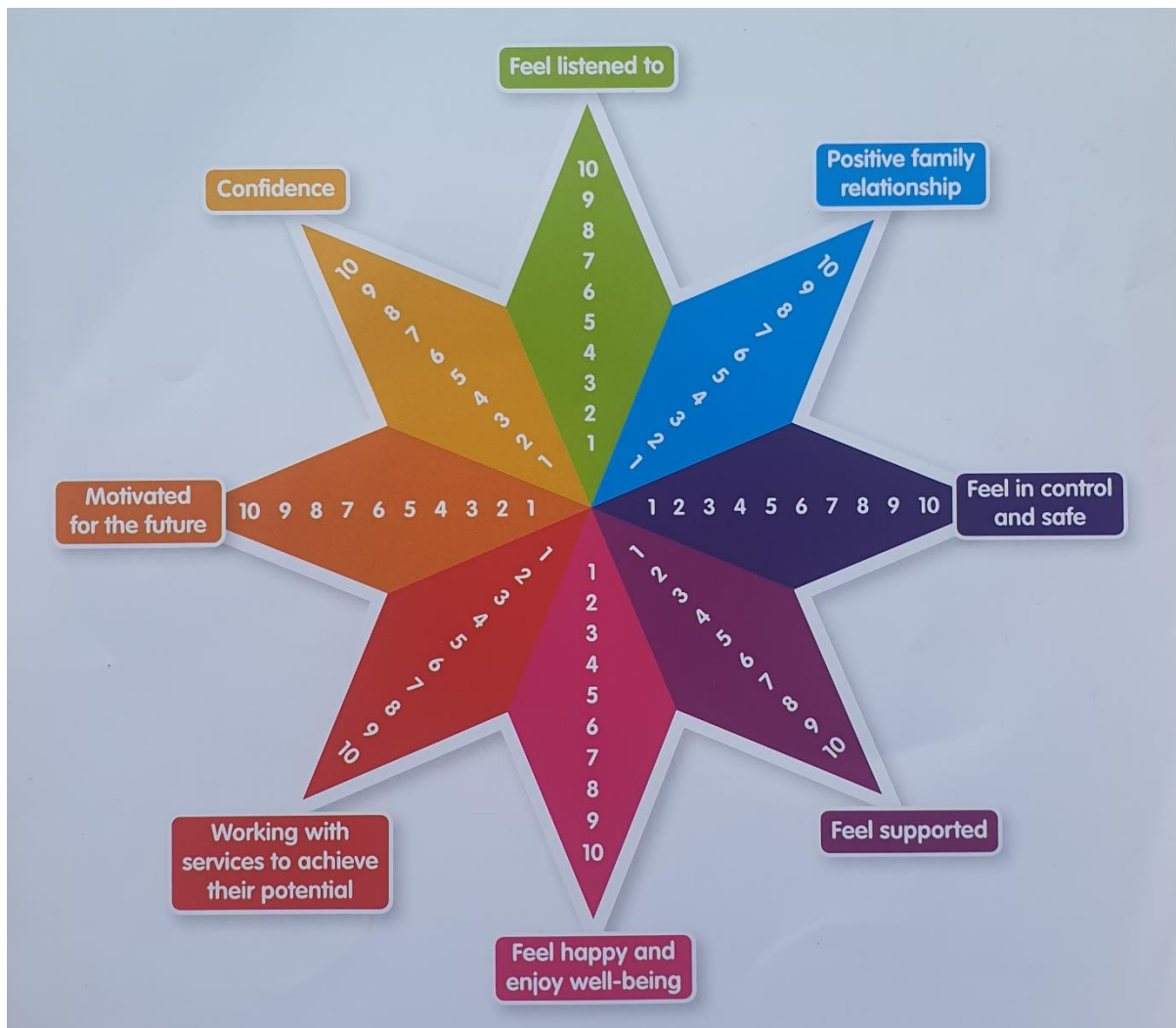
ES2: I have a lot of will power.

ES3: I am able to concentrate better than most people under distracting conditions.

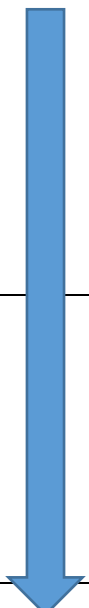
ES4: I can bear physical discomfort better than most.

ES5: When I have a job to do, I am not easily distracted.

## Appendix 2: The Outcome Star – Parental measuring tool



### Appendix 3: Timeline of change in identity capital thinking

Timing	Identity capital development	Philosophical underpinning	Methodological development
October 2015 	Ideas from previous postgraduate research. Connected to self-esteem. Cote's ideas of locus of control The needs of these for 'getting on in life' Mostly liked to workplace	Not thought out	Thoughts of structured/semi structured interview with parents of both genders  Focus group orientated Participatory methods
		A basic understanding of social constructionism	
Spring 2016	Identity capital mediated by the construction of society		Pilot study 1. Semi structured interviews with parents. Listening for words that were part of Cotes work on identity capital. Asking about these in interview. Drawing silence. Stunted answers  Focus group pilot – too complex, possibly unethical
PhD transfer panel May 2017	Concentrating on Shuller and Watson (2009) triangle of identity, social and human capital  Bateson's work on continuity and change		*Life stories told were more interesting than asking questions. Research into narrative inquiry

	mediating identity capital		
Summer 2017	*Cannot be inside of the head constructions like self-esteem etc. Must have an element of relational and are not "found" or "mined" in the interviews as words.	Reading all of Gergen's work. Relational Being	
Autumn 2017		Agency is relational	Biographical Narrative Interview Method Training with Tom Wengraf (2017) London  More pilot studies using BNIM
Winter 2017			Interviews and transcriptions
Summer 2018	Possible link between identity capital and relational agency  The because of and in spite of elements	The words loss and gain related to such capital. Are these related to structuralism and binary oppositions? Ebb and flow Built up / down Deplete / increase	Re-presentation ethical dilemmas

## Appendix 4: The Eight Moments of Qualitative Research Model

The <i>Eight Moments of Qualitative Research Model</i> (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; 2011)	
Traditional period 1900-1950	Influenced by ethnography and Chicago School of sociology. Interested in the other, the different, or strange. Mostly objective descriptions and interpretations (Flick, 2014)
The Modernist / Golden Age 1950- 1970	Influenced by theory development (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) Ethnomethodology and analysis of the every-day situation (Garfinkel, 1967) Interest in conversations Coding from participant observation
Blurred Genres 1970-1986	Symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology. Interpretation of phenomena through narratives and essay writing rather than coding and categorizing The development of computer programmes (Flick 2014) The researcher became a bricoleur – borrowing from different disciplines (Denzin, 2006)
The Crisis of Representation 1986-1990	Data analysis more concerned with interpretation than on identifying linear models (Flick, 2014) Traditional criteria (validity, reliability, generalizability) become questionable due to the discourse on reality. The versions of self-presented at interview may not correspond with the version given to a different researcher on a different day. The interpretation and findings are also then questioned. (Flick, 2014). The crisis of representation and legitimisation begins to be discussed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) Technological advances to aid analysing data
The Fifth Moment – Postmodern 1990-1995	Experimental ethnographies The struggle to make sense of the crises Action research, participatory methods research is deployed to counteract some of the crises of interpretation (Tobin and Begley, 2004)

<p>The Sixth Moment Post- Experimental Enquiry 1995-2000</p>	<p>The use of creative nonfiction, autobiographical ethnography, poetic representations, multimedia presentation. There is a link to the ideology of a free democratic society (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005)</p>
<p>The Seventh Moment – 2000-2010 The methodologically contested age</p>	<p>The period of “ferment and explosion” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp 2-12), that is “defined by breaks from the past, a focus on previously silent voices, and a concern with moral discourse” (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000, p. 1048).”</p> <p>How critical interpretive practices can help change the world (Denzin, 2001)</p>
<p>The Eighth Moment – The future</p>	<p>“Confronting a methodological backlash associated with evidence-based social movements. Concerned with moral discourse...(and) critical conversations around democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)</p> <p>“... we are already in the ‘post- post’ period—post-post-structuralism, post-postmodernism, post-postexperimentalism. What this means for interpretive...practice is not clear...” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 26)</p>

## Appendix 5: Information and consent form



### Information Sheet for Parents

My name is Jessica Pitman and I am studying for a PhD with the Wales Centre for Equity in Education and which is part of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. I used to work in parenting groups as a facilitator. I'd like to invite you to be part of my research project.

#### What is the Research About?

I am asking you to be part of this study because you are a parent in a Flying Start area. I am interested to see how you view yourself, and the world around you.

#### What will it involve?

**Stage 1:** I will visit you in a place of your choice, outside your home for around 20 minutes to talk to you about the study and ask for your consent. I will ask you to complete a short "tick" questionnaire about how old you are/male/female etc.

**Stage 2:** We will do the interview in a place that is most convenient to you. It will take about 2 hours. This will be audio recorded so I can remember what has been said. I may write things down as you are talking. This is to help me remember important things you have said. There may be a need for a second interview if there are more questions to ask.

**I will ask a simple question and ask you to talk about your life story. I will write down some of the points that you talk about and ask if there is any more detail on each point after you finished your story.**

When the research is completed, I will provide a summary report. Please leave your details on the consent form if you would be interested in this.

#### Confidentiality and writing about the research



I will be using the information you give me in interview to write my dissertation and will also be using information in articles for journals, reports, training, and presentations. However the things you tell me will be confidential. This means I won't let anyone else know your name or personal details.

I will never use your real name when writing or discussing my project. "THE PLACE WHERE YOU LIVE" will not be mentioned and I will refer to it as an urban area of South Wales. I may also change other identifiable features like the gender and number of children or locations. As with any type of interview, if I am worried about something you have said and feel you or someone else, including your children are at risk of harm, then I have a duty of care to pass this information on to the relevant people.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You can change your mind at any time. Consent is totally voluntary. If you change your mind all the information you gave me will be destroyed.

### **What happens now?**

Take some time to think about whether you want to be involved. If you would like to be part of it please sign the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me via email or phone (details below) if you would like to talk about the study in more detail.

Jessica Pitman: **Postgraduate Research Student**  
Room MA203, FADE Building  
Mount Pleasant Campus  
Swansea SA1 6ED  
Tel: 01792 481258 1503004@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Thank you for reading and thinking about being part of this research project.



### Consent Form for Parents

*“How is identity capital constructed in the narrative experiences of fathers? Voices from parenting projects in one region in Wales”.*

**\*Please Initial\***

I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above study. I have had the chance to think about the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that being part of this research is voluntary and I can stop being part of it at any time, without giving a reason.

I understand my information will be used in articles, reports, and/or presentations etc.

I understand my name will not be used if I contribute to the research and my place/area name will be changed.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:	Signature:	Date:
Name of Researcher: Jessica Pitman	Signature:	Date:

The original copy of this form be kept securely in a file at UWTSD Room MA203, FADE Building, Mount Pleasant Campus, Swansea. SA1 6ED.

## Appendix 6: Demographic Questionnaire



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU

**Y Drindod Dewi Sant**

UNIVERSITY OF WALES

**Trinity Saint David**

Ref:

Thank you for helping with this study.

This questionnaire is **optional**. If you **prefer not to answer a question, please leave blank** and move on to the next one.

All information is confidential and forms will be destroyed after the data is gathered.

1. How many children do you have?

2. What are their ages?

3. How long have you been coming to this group?

4. Are you:

Male:

Female:

Other:

5. How old are you?

6. Do you parent:

- Alone
- Share parenting but do not live together
- Share parenting and live together
- I'm not in contact with the children at the moment
- Other: Please write in .....

**7. How would you describe your national identity?**

- Welsh
- Scottish
- English
- Northern
- Irish
- British

Other: Please write in: .....

**8. What is your religion?**

- No religion
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh

Other: Please write in: .....

**9. How would you best describe your ethnic group?**

Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

**White**

- Welsh / English / Scottish / Northern Irish / British **(please circle)**
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, *please describe* .....

**Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups**

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, *please describe*.....

**Asian / Asian British**

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Any other Asian background, *please describe*.....

**Black / African / Caribbean / Black British**

African

Caribbean

Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, *please describe*.....

**Other Ethnic Groups:**

Arab

Any other ethnic group, *please describe* .....

**10. What term best describes your sexual identity?**

Heterosexual ('straight')

Gay or lesbian

Bisexual

Other

**11. Do you consider yourself as having a disability? (this may include hidden disabilities like mental health or learning disability)**

Yes

No

**12. What is your main language?**

English

Welsh

Other. Please write in .....

**a. How well can you speak English?**

Very well

Well

Not well

Not at all

**13. What is the highest qualification you have? (This could be from school)**

..... Level .....

**14. Are you currently employed?**

**Yes, I work**

a. **What do you do?** .....

b. **How many hours do you work, on average, per week?**

15 or less

16-30

31-48

48 or more

Other please write in: .....

**No, I do not work at present because:**

I look after a home and family

I am a student

I am retired

I am long-term sick or disabled

Other, please write in .....



**Thank you very much for your time**

**Jessica Pitman**

**University of Wales Trinity St. David**

**MA 302**

**Mount Pleasant Campus**

**Swansea**

**SA1 6ED**

**0776916814**

## Appendix 7: BNIM notepad (Wengraf, 2017)

BNIM NOTEPAD – T’s Interview 15/9/17 1.30pm Kitchen table.

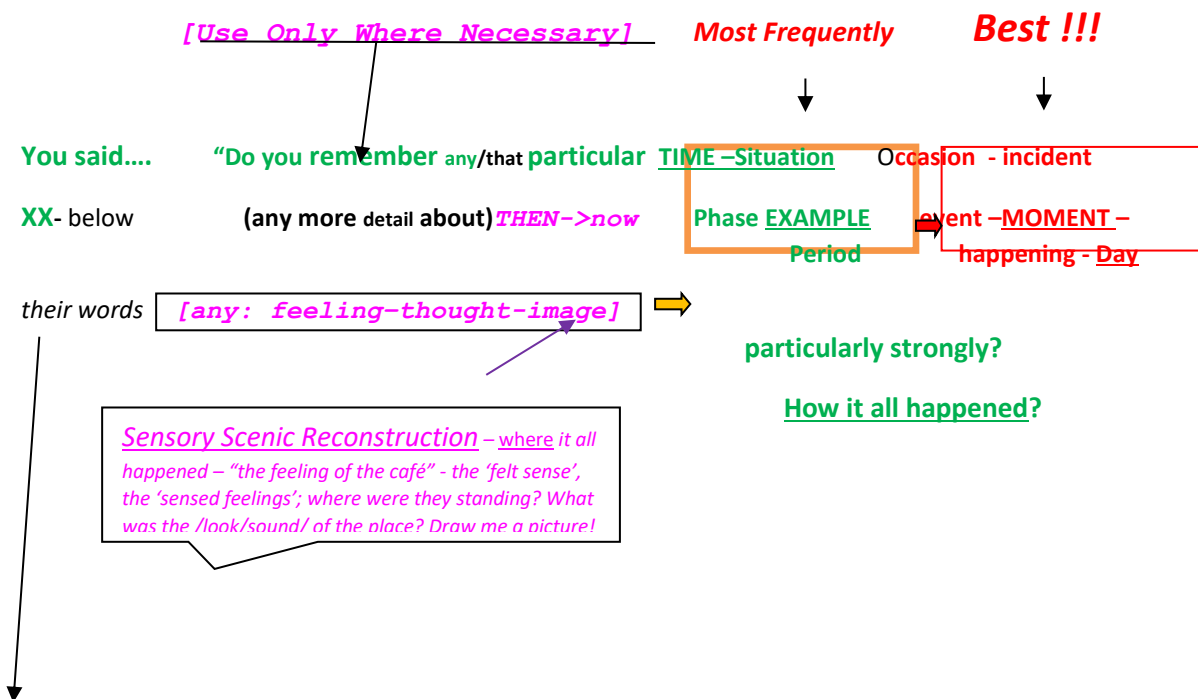
1 **Emotional recognition of their and your emotional states** (if necessary); working through / time out (if necessary)

2. Then: Push pausefully and gracefully towards narrative, **push for (in) PINs (see bottom of page)**

(if necessary via left-hand bundles **back** towards the right-hand one)

Use this **magic formula (in green)+**

your **rightwards** choice of magic word from *one of the three* bundles



ROUND 2 MAGICWORDS..... ROUND 3 MAGICWORD.... ROUND N MAGICWORDS

**Keep your noting with indentations (to show rounds) as per example page**

**to stop yourself going back by mistake or missing out possibilities**

**Writing up the Notepad:**

SS1

1.

1.1

1.2

1.3.1

2.

2.1

2.2

2.3

2.3.1

2.3.2

Carry on 3, 3.1, 3.2 etc 4,5,6 etc

## Appendix 8: Transcription symbols

Symbol	Example	Found in:
<b>BOLD CAPITALS</b>	Indicate loud talking	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
( )	Empty brackets/ parenthesis: The researcher cannot understand what is being said	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
(word in between brackets)	This indicates possible hearings of words	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
((words))	Double parentheses means it is the researchers words and descriptions, usually to give further explanation	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
-	Hyphens are found where words are cut off. Can be found usually when someone or something interrupts talking.  Can also be found when hyphenating syllables or stuttering/stammering	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)  Morgan (2014)
=	No break between utterances. One follows the other	Morgan (2014) Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
!	Indicates an animated tone, not always an exclamation	Morgan (2014)
[	A left bracket shows where the speaker's talk is overlapped by someone else's talk	Wengraf (2004) Silverman (1997)
]	A right brackets show where someone else's talk ends	Morgan (2014)
...	3 dots means a pause as if the participant is thinking of what to say	My own contribution
<i>Different font italicised</i>	Used in transcribing when parts have been fictionalised. This is not used in the main thesis.	My own contribution

## Appendix 9: Transcription notes example

MADE UP TRANSCRIPT 20/6/2020 KITCHEN DESK

	who	Comments
01	J	
02	SS1	Talking really fast. Possibly nervous?
03		So, I just want to show you how I would set out my <b>AWESOME</b> transcription which ( ) you to think about how my research notes looked at the time. Umm... ((long pause)). I like this type of set up because it has a comment box and it's useful to jot down not-
04		
05	M	Hey! That's all very interesting but what does 'SS1' mean at the top in number 01? Could you not- [J: I'm getting to it!] just start from the start?
06		
07	J	Look! I'm mega tired and I-I-I can't really tell what I'm doing. I had... I had a very long coach trip from <b>Bangor</b> yesterday. We went all around the windy roads I thought I was going to have a heart attack
08		
09	M	<b>Bangor</b> is a long way. Who did you go with? And did you use the right bracket a lot in your transcription?
10		
11	J	No. Not at all. I think it is suited more for when you have a lot of people talking together

